

The Cenacle

14TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE



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*Whatever happens. Whatever
what is is is what
I want. Only that. But that.*

-Galway Kinnell, "Prayer," 1985.

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McDonald's, 19th Burnside
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"The nature of things is in the habit
of concealing itself"
- Heraclitus, Fragment 54

This is the 14th anniversary issue
of The Cenacle, & welcome. The above
quotation from Heraclitus, the great
ancient Greek philosopher, is apt now
as ever, & worth considering, worth framing
the following thoughts.

Since the last issue of this periodical
in December, a much-anticipated change
of leadership has occurred in the United
States, & this change has had effects
across the world. Even as nations every-
where suffer through the global economic
downturn, there is a widespread feeling
of hope. The shitstorm called George
W. Bush, eight years long, is dissipating,
better days are coming. Why? Because
they are? Some pervasive bad feeling is
going fast; some good one is coming.

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The Heraclitus quotation reminds us that the sum of now is not the sum of all, the world comprises countless numbers of moving parts moving all the time.

So times will get better, & worse again, & better again. I wonder: is this progress then? Is there a way, on the upswing, to keep going up? While I can no more deny Mayan prophecies about 2012, or Christian claims about Christ's return, than I can affirm them, much less believe in them deep in my heart (where faith prospers or dwells), I do not think the cycle of feast & famine must continue indefinitely. There can be more, better, different.

What I believe is that better days involve hard work, & some luck, & an ~~essential~~ acknowledgment that what we've achieved as a race is not enough, that we can do better. Some couch this in terms of environmental or economic catastrophes to be avoided, but I'd maintain that such threats are not enough to change human behavior fundamentally.

What then? Perhaps a shift in

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the way people in so-called advanced societies are treated by their governments: as consumers & possible law-breakers. We are essentially directed from youth to consume & consume & consume but only what is sanctioned. Thus our drug laws & our morality laws, & our deep slavery to paychecks as a reward for good consumption, & law-abiding.

Directed how to dress, what to eat, what to believe, what to fear, how to spend our hours & days & years, with these directions reinforced by pop culture & mass media & legal threat, most of us live lives within a clearly defined box. At most daring, rebellion occurs in mid- to late-adolescence. Comes & goes. Comes because the human heart is a mystery wild for freedom, novelty, stimuli; goes because there is nothing in the power structures to encourage it. One "grows up," "settles down," finds a place among his or her fellows. Makes babies, lets them run free for a couple of years at most, then sets them on the track to acculturation via school & socialization.

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But what about when millions of people who've done all this, learned the rules & lived by them, are laid off from their jobs, lose their homes? What then?

President Obama called times ^{such} as these an opportunity, & I agree with him, after a fashion. Perhaps he meant no more than to re-structure society on a more equal footing, fix broken institutions & outdated laws. This would be enough in itself, & seems what grand task he is upon.

But enough? I don't believe so. Times will get better, as they do, but will it be progress with a small or capital P? I'd tend to say the former.

Yet why would the least famine cycle be any more likely to change now than at any other time? In truth, I don't know. These woods we are in right now are dark & deep. Perhaps the years of effort alone is enough to exhaust tries for more. Once the mass of men & women are mostly employed again, & George Bush's foreign wars are ceased, & a greater domestic tranquility again reigns, what

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more, what else?

I suppose what I am stumbling toward is questioning whether or not it is possible for ~~some~~ material prosperity to no longer be the benchmark by which human happiness is adjudged. I'd hate to say at least maybe. Given how many of our legal disputes over such issues as abortion & gay marriage ~~are~~ contain a profound moral dimension, it seems clear to me that most people in part act from impulses not rooted in being consumers or law-abiders. There is more, something else, Heraclitus's concealed "nature of things."

Say again: what then? There is no agreement on why or how we are here, or what we are supposed to do, or what happens when we expire.

The moral dimension in us drives our arguments, even to how much we owe as a society to those laid off their jobs, or who have lost their homes. Humans will align with or oppose each other for a thousand & more reasons: skin color, language, ideology, nationality, gender, sexual preference. Red Sox vs. Yankees. Beatles vs.

Rolling Stones.

The best I can speculate is that there will come a time not long from now when things are improving, the world feels friendlier, safer for more people. This time will seep in when there will be some who want to push our boundaries, our possibilities, & there will be some who desist, wish to slow up a bit, stabilize what has been achieved.

When this time comes, there will be choices large & small that each of us will make, things we do to push or lay back on progress. There's no right or wrong with any of this - just my feeling that, this time around, we should push - & push - & push & push - what holds us back but our fears, our dark memories? What holds us back but ourselves?

If it isn't Christ, or 2012, or a monster asteroid, or some such, then what will break the feast & famine cycle will be us, all of us, going further than we have ever before dared, pushing through what restrains us, past fear maybe past mortality itself.

4-30-2009



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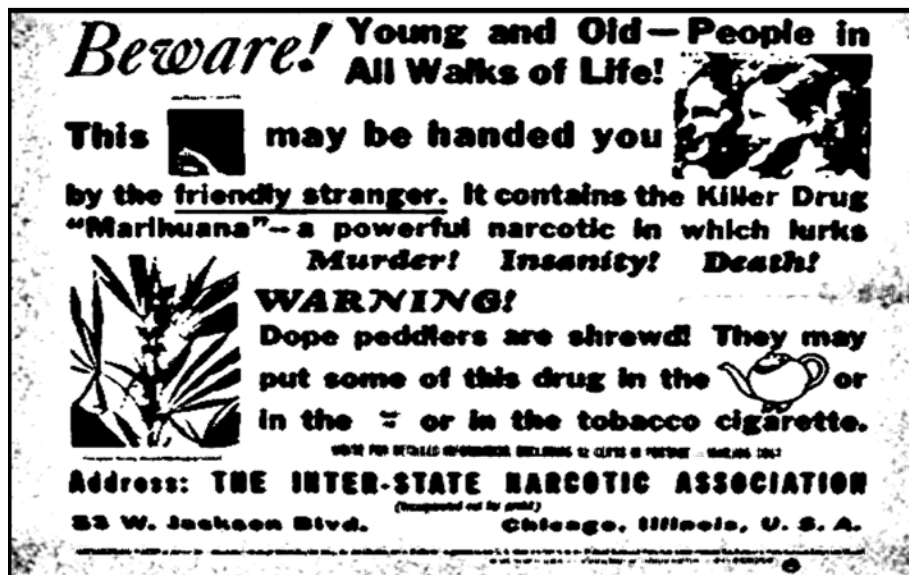
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Christopher Patrick Gose



World's Window: Ruminations Entheonautic and Otherwise, Being an Account of My Travels in the New World

. . . to my mother

*She began to cry when you said good-bye
and sank into your dreams.
—Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard*

Preface

Growing up suburban, in the veritable heart of Reagan America, often has the flavor of that bowl of oatmeal you eat every morning. On its own, oatmeal isn't much to write home about; some people even prefer their oatmeal plain. Add a little psilocybin, a pinch of LSD, a dab of DMT, and a veritable cornucopia of 2-c-special-g flavored research chemicals, however, and that bowl of oatmeal suddenly transforms into "Alan's Psychedelic Breakfast." For me, however, the journey into the center of the visionary potential of the human nervous system, out of the mundane world of war-bloated American consciousness, begins—and ends—with the world of plant medicine, and many a drug tale along the way.

In terms of background, I—like many entheonauts—come from an unlikely world. My mother, an oil heiress, was classically unstable in the borderline sense. Her presence, sporadic across the yawning chasm of my childhood memories, formed the basis of a particular set of imprints that have been a focus of my young adult life. Nevertheless, and in spite of her instability, she was a remarkable woman in her own way. Her second husband expressed it most beautifully in snidely commenting at her funeral, "she was EVERYONE'S friend, wasn't she?"—an off-color reference to affairs she certainly had during their marriage. Still, she was quick to laugh, ready to love (when actually present), infinitely generous, and forgave without thought as to transgressions against her person. In my own life, I have emulated the example of her heart while transmuting the *prima materia* of her failings.

My father—God bless him—remains a man wholly devoted to the straight and narrow mythology of Reagan America, or what the patron saint of misinformation Rush Limbaugh errantly refers to as "principled conservatism." Though I can't tell you precisely what "principled conservatism" actually is, I do believe it involves a combination of constipation, indigestion, and general bloat. My father suffered—and unfortunately still suffers—from all of the above. While I love my father dearly, shortly after 9/11—in response to an email I sent to him containing a biting and brilliant political commentary on American military-industrialism by MIT linguist and cognitive revolutionary Noam Chomsky—, my father showered me with a barrage of *ad hominem* character attacks with the ultimate aim of bringing me into the mold of "principled conservatism." Like any well meaning son, I made what effort I could to stomach the meal that had been laid on my table; I even joined the army to appease his blood lust and expectations for my life. In the end, I opted for more nourishing fare.

I remember the very first time I ingested psilocybin mushrooms. It changed my life—plunging from the edge of middle high school, with all of its awkward, pubescent moments, like some morbid

sociobiological testing ground for primate postures. During these awkward years, I spent a great deal of time in solitude reaching out for those occasional instances of affect and gesticulatory reflection. Truly, and for all its pain and uncertainty, the human experience is indeed a beautiful one, especially when seen as an unfolding retrospection. The year I first imbibed of the sacred mushroom, I had developed a particular interest in the inspired musings of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and the nineteenth-century French hashish eaters. I mulled over Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*, and fancied myself precocious, except for the fact that I wasn't a particularly popular young man. In the *Flowers of Evil*, I intuited the first and faint stirrings of an authentic *complexio oppisitorum*, ripe with mystery and the irrational vicissitudes of the heart. As an American-Irishman, I lusted after things strange: the stranger the better. In Baudelaire's vision of the "artificial paradise," my youthful fancy found wings and took flight. I would sit beneath the trees and imagine I was the sole denizen of a moon-bound garden rife with Baudelaire's flowers of evil. The centerpiece of this perfumed flower garden overflowed, as if some sort of alien and opulescent fountain, spilling out into four causeways from the crux point. Consequently and unbeknownst to me at the time, the word for psychedelic sacrament in the Nahuatl language of the ancient Aztecs translates to mean "flower."

The mushroom became the centerpiece of my imaginal Eden in the years that followed. One day while perusing books in the library, I came across the image of an Indian woman holding mushrooms out over smoke in her outstretched hands, eyes half-closed in prayerful reflection. The image took on a life of its own in my imagination, and that life was larger than my own. Since that time, I have identified the image as one taken from Gordon Wasson's *The Wondrous Mushroom*, but to this day the image in my mind's eye remains much larger than the one from Allan Richardson's photograph. For not only does everything appear expanded, but there is a light escaping off the top and convex lenticular surface of the saprophytic basidiocarp like stardust off a fish's back. Several years later, the very same *Lumen Natura* shown clearly through the illustrations and photography that accompany the Oss/Oeric psilocybin mushroom cultivation guide. The image captured my attention in one resolute gesture of mystery that has guided my soul ever since for, "we are stardust, we are golden, we are billion year old carbon, and we've got to get ourselves back to the garden."

In a cosmic adumbration of what psychedelic and literary pioneer Aldous Huxley termed "gratuitous grace," later that very same day I happened to be walking into the boys' locker room when a friend of mine ran into me and, reaching into his overcoat pocket, handed me a bag full of the very same genus of mushroom I had earlier seen as an image in the student library: Psilocybe. Over the years, the manifestation of the mushroom in my life as a guiding Imagos of the sacred has uniformly been accompanied by what analytic psychologist Carl Jung has termed *synchronicity*. Synchronicity, an acausal principle of connection between disparate spatial and temporal events, finds its most apt mythological expression in the Greek figure Eros: winged god of Ecstasy and the spontaneous product of the fusion of Chaos and Gaia. Like the "flowers of evil" image which equates the delicate beauty of a flower with diabolical *daemonia*, two forces in seeming and impossible opposition to one another are brought into a state of inexorable fusion, what alchemists refer as the *Coniunctionis*. From this fusion erupts an irrational and transcendent Other which brings the entire system into a supraconscious state. Synchronicity is the temporal sensing of this supraconscious Other, and has been observed to be prescient of the revelation of Spirit in its incarnation as supraconscious Other: oneness with God, atonement of father and son.

Entheonautics Defined

The term *enttheonautics* is less esoteric than it may seem. The basic idea is to provide a metaphor for that paradoxical state where one can be open to a profoundly novel and disorienting world while also maintaining a sense of personal direction; where—in the words of Wade Davis—one "need only spin the compass" to discover the world and our lives anew. Simultaneously, and on a personal note, the

idea has been part of the development of a clear sense of orientation and direction in my own life, and the lives of family and friends. In meeting this challenge, I have necessarily invoked a concept that over the years has been incredibly difficult to express in a form that does not tend to make people profoundly uncomfortable. Based on a particular philosophy developed by the Greek thinker Democritus (whom I tend to credit with some of the most ancient thinking on which the atomic/molecular worldview is based), this approach functions on the basic assumption that, at our core, is a certain Atomistic kernel, seed/nut or essence. The Greeks called it “daimonia,” an idea that was further developed by Jung in the hypothesis (yes, I suspect it’s testable/falsifiable) of the archetypes. The basic idea is that we have an extremely flexible and mutable blueprint or basic “calling” to our lives.

Over the years, I’ve often heard various adumbrations of the “direction” question as it was being asked of experts/authorities in the field of psychedelic studies: “if I’m interested in psychedelics, what do I study?” or “how do I integrate psychedelic insight into my daily life?” or “what does the psychedelic experience imply in terms of this or that life experience?” More obtusely, I think the psychedelic experience can tend to inculcate a particular sort of shamanic/mystical worldview in certain individuals—a worldview very much at odds with the status quo of the cultural climate in which most of us exist in the 21st century. In fact, I don’t think the shamanic/mystical worldview is as unusual or exotic as it tends to be viewed; in fact, I believe that aspects of the shamanic/mystical worldview are quite pragmatic, a function of brain chemistry, and likely the result of certain types of evolutionary pressures that were placed on our ancestors. University of Arizona anthropologist Wiseman expresses it quite simply in stating that shamanism and its various technologies and accoutrements allow larger numbers of people to come together and stably interact at the group level. I believe shamanism has also served the function of providing some flexibility in terms of the nascent family imprints we develop during the infant stage of our life; I believe this flexibility—which is also grounded in the brain’s own neoteny—has allowed the human species to occupy an incredibly broad array of ecological niches on this planet. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the shamanic worldview can be difficult to accept, such as the Navajo assertion that the four mountains of their native homeland are “sacred,” “alive” and constitute a sort of space-time mandala and maternal matrix. So here we’re getting closer to the whole issue of “direction,” “gaining one’s bearings,” and all of those issues implied by the entheonautic metaphor—for the shamanic worldview is full of these self-orienting motifs: “sacred mountains,” “world trees,” “sacred calendars.” I see these metaphors as being grounded in a specifically integrated mode of consciousness: the holistic, occasionally intuitive, insightful mode of consciousness that weaves seemingly disparate elements into a cohesive fabric. I don’t know if there’s necessarily any “truth” to these things, but I feel like I need a sense of wholeness in my life. Functionally, this mode of consciousness seems to bring people together towards some common purpose, a behavior that has obvious implications in terms of our fitness as a species.

As an example of the sort of dilemma I’m trying to get at, let’s give the Brothers Grimm fairy tale of the “Spirit in the Bottle” a psychedelic twist. As the story goes, a young man becomes tired one day with the monotony of his father’s metalsmithing (a work-ethic metaphor), so escapes to the forest to discover his own metal (the new work-ethic). As he’s wandering lost in the forest, a voice calls out to him from beneath a tree: “help me, I’m buried beneath this tree; if you help me, I will give you a gift.” To make a long story short, the young man tames the “spirit in the bottle” and is given a magical cloth with which he can heal any disease (his vocation). So let’s say, in our case, that a young man becomes lost in the forest but, instead of a voice beneath a tree, he hears a voice in a mushroom, or a plant.

You can see the obvious dilemma I’m getting at: you have an experience, and this experience is so completely central to who you are that you don’t have any choice but to seriously entertain it as a real and living possibility. However, by taking this experience seriously and honestly scrutinizing all that it implies, you become the object of certain vitriol; I often find myself in situations where I become defensive over my basic value system.

Sometimes I feel that I have lost my own way, perhaps that I am part of a particular time and

culture that is very much lost—and I suspect that I am not alone in feeling this way. So this journey is something of an effort to gain my bearings—give some direction to myself, my family, my friends. Tomorrow I'm heading to the forest, and I plan on getting lost; I plan on getting very high and taking it all to heart. Obviously, I need to find a solution to this dilemma that is inclusive of my own personality and its dynamics while being practical and down to earth.

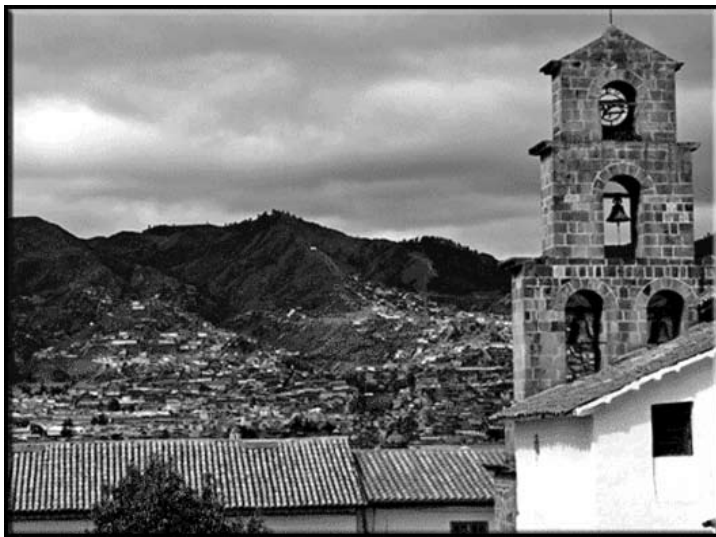
2/07/2009 Cusco, Peru

*Not only is this world stranger than we suppose,
it is stranger than we CAN suppose.*
—Terence McKenna

The incessant hum and noise of Lima, a swarthy maelstrom of sprawl and velocity; our one night in the city was restless. As we landed in the earlier part of the evening, I found myself feeling a bit more relaxed and emotionally open. On the heels of my dream the night prior to leaving Albuquerque, something emerged in the undulate rhythm of place and people, like a slow and flowing ocean current; the sensual gait of the Peruvian stewardesses, the oscillating current of the language. As I sat looking up into the open skylight of our hotel in Lima, listening to the pulse of the city and in spite of being desperately tired, I felt alive and on the cusp of wonder. For all the ugliness of Lima, flying into Cusco over the Andes was truly breath-taking. Stark mountainsides, lush and green ascending snow-capped peaks.

Our arrival into Cusco was punctuated by extreme exhaustion, and a vastly overpriced taxi-ride from the airport. From the airport we quickly proceeded to the San Blas district of the city on the far northern end of the Cuzco valley, which is more of a cradle of mountains than a valley. Cusco itself is quite charming with narrow alleyways paved with cobblestone, an open drainage system and small cultivated gardens tucked into each and every corner. Arriving quite early, and our room not yet prepared, we waited some time in the living area adjacent to the patio-courtyard at our hostel. Our host quickly offered coca tea, our first exposure to the plant that was much of my motivation in visiting this region of Peru. My first cup induced a mild and expansive elevation of mood that sent us out into the city in spite of the exhaustion of three days of travel with little sleep.

Cusco is gorgeous and powerful in its own right, nestled into the hills of the high Andes. Everything is built with economy and on top of everything else, with the effect of receding terraces



Iglesia de San Blas

of terra cotta roofing. As you ascend any of the given hills of Cusco, the view across the valley is most extraordinary. Framed on either side by tightly knit brickwork in the Incan style, the valley stretches out below in a dark orange terra-cotta ocean of syncretic Incan-colonial architecture and style.

From San Blas, narrow streets descend steeply into the central municipal valley. At the center, the Plaza de Armas consists of a large church on the northern side of the square with the stone plaza situated around a central park. Further south and to the west,

the bustling San Pedro market was a real education in Peruvian culture, with *Erythroxylum coca*, *Trichocereus pachanoi*, and *Banisteriopsis caapi* being openly sold together with the vegetables and the fruits. Our first day, I bought coca together with a hard ball of lime-llipta and quickly returned to our room, which was ready for us by this time. Much of the first day I chewed coca and, after several hours of chewing, quickly fell into that lucid, wafting dream state of which I am so familiar. I felt myself gently drifting down the valley on a sort of tumbling cloud of light, soaring above a receding crevasse that was like a flowing cradle. The horizon recedes and I peer deep into this infinite and spacious chasm, and there's an unfathomable sense that this journey into the heart of the New World is blessed, and I am somehow seeing through my mother's eyes. Who knows how long it lasted, but there was something profoundly reassuring about it, soothing to the soul.

2/08/2009 Cusco, Peru

Let the world change you, and you can change the world.
—Che Guevara

Our first night was quite restless, and Gratefulbear showed clear signs of altitude sickness of a mild variety, but nothing a few cups of coca tea didn't take care of. I dreamt of my brother, and the regret of losing a close friend. In the dream, he is packing all of his things and leaving. I open his closet and find my bookshelf in it, noticing three specific books: *Unspoken Sermons*, and *Thomas Wingfold* by George Macdonald and a third book that is so worn in its binding as to be unrecognizable. I am somehow compelled to open the book and sign it as a farewell gesture to my brother.

We visited Qorikancha today, a real window into the world of the Inca. Translated to mean “Court of Gold,” Qorikancha was the very axis of the city of Cusco, itself considered the “navel of the world.” Here at Qorikancha, more than four thousand priests are said to have lived. At its centerpiece was said to have been an immense golden disk positioned in such a way that the morning light reflected off its surface into the main temple. While Qorikancha is today a sort of amalgam of archaeological curiosity and Catholic presence, the court remains a startling example of Incan stonework. Stonework that, when originally encountered by the Spanish, was proclaimed to be the “product of demons,” an assertion perhaps less fantastic than some of the speculation today (extraterrestrials, plants capable of dissolving rock).

In all likelihood, the actual explanation for the elegance of Incan stonework may be far simpler. To quarry the stone, the masons sought natural weaknesses in the rock, small fissures that could be widened by planting a wooden wedge and soaking it in water. Once a block of stone broke free, it could be worked with harder rocks by a series of abrasive blows that in time would transform its surface. Once a block of stone broke free, it could be worked with harder rocks, by a series of abrasive blows that in time would transform its surface. Experiments have shown that, even without iron tools, a shapeless lump of andesite can be turned into a smooth cube in just two hours. Perhaps even more miraculous than an extraterrestrial or magical explanation, the actual explanation for Incan stone working betrays an attitude towards stone that is almost impossible to comprehend. The Inca seem to have viewed matter as living, dynamic, and even divine; the transformation of matter thus seems to have been viewed as a service to the gods. Naturally, time has no meaning for a task in service of the divine, and such an attitude harnessed by a system of imperial governance explains in part how the Inca were so prolific. This basic attitude seems common to many indigenous groups and is more



Qorikancha

generically expressed in the notion of the sanctity of land. At Qorikancha, 41 imaginary spokes are said to have radiated outwards and beyond the horizon as determined by the stars, the sun, and the moon, connecting various communities in space within the cosmological framework of the land of the Inca Empire. To this day, and in spite of the Conquest, one religious icon of the Inca remains: the earth itself. Echoed in the Pachamama concept, I somehow sense that the earth is still viewed as sacred in this place.

2/09/2009 Cusco, Peru

*I've walked these streets,
a spectacle of sights to see.
—Natalie Merchant*

Last night I chewed coca all night long. Looking out westward over Cusco, just before the rising of the sun, the following vision unfolded over the terra-cotta roofing of the city.

Outside the window (*una ventana al mundo*), there was the face of a masticating jaguar, chewing and chewing with a vicious look upon its face. As it chews, I become very unsettled staring at it but could not turn away; my gaze was fixed. As I fixated on the face of the jaguar, my field of vision kind of rolled over in a gyrating fashion to the left, and to the left of the jaguar I saw the face of a very old tree, brow ruffled and eyes closed in sleep.

I became highly unsettled as this unfolded, dripping with sweat and heart pounding, my mind echoed, “must raise the dead; must raise the dead,” and the bleary-eyed tree began to awaken. Rolling over again to the left, I then saw a bird like a more of a downward slit of an again, there is a face conquistador, and his right to left with a face native with a stern become one that is an and there is a shaft of its feral brow, and a top shot through by becomes some sort thunderbird. Then the left, there’s a circle in white, faces veiled something in their



Mama Coca

midst that is hidden from my view. To the farthest left of the sequence, there is an angel, wings spread outwards and behind, hands outstretched as if receiving whatever is being witnessed in the circle. Then my eyes toggle all the way to the right, and the jaguar is chewing, chewing: vicious face. Then right to left, right to left: it looks like a tube or a horn of some sort. Then left to right and the central piece of the tube with the robed women, tree / conquistadore / Indian / owl / thunderbird become smooth and faceless, and there’s only the winged angel on the left and the masticating jaguar on the right. Left, then all the way right, and the jaguar turns and looks at me straight in the eyes with a vicious smile, then a look of recognition and friendship, and dissolves into formless light. Then right to left, and the angel has been transformed into a blue bird with an immense and rainbow tail, turns around and flies away just as the sun peaks over the mountains. I have no interpretation for this most peculiar of messages from the coca ally.

Coca must certainly be one of the more fascinating plants of South America. A spectrum of domesticated plant varieties almost surely derived from a common Bolivian ancestor, *Erythroxylum*'s coca and novogranatense were considered one of the three sacred plants of the Inca—as well as yage and manioc—sent by Wirakocha at the dawn of creation. Ubiquitously known as “mama coca” throughout the Andes, the status of coca amongst the peoples of Peru is aptly expressed in t-shirts and signs all throughout the sacred valley, “las hojas de la coca no es una droga, es cultura” (the leaves of coca are not a drug, they are culture). As a barometer of Incan influence, the presence of coca forms a sort of cultural dyad of the continuity and extent of the Incan empire; where the Inca were, you today find both coca and corn. Though much of the existent patterns of coca use are hybrid forms of the ancient patterns, there are certain groups that seem to maintain their relationship with coca in an ostensibly pure form.

In the Kogi mythologem, the cosmos is conceived autoegocratically by the Great Mother, who anoints one of her pubic hairs with menstrual blood and then impregnates herself with a phallic lime-stick. Descendants of the ancient Tairona civilization, for the Kogi the chewing of coca is the purest activity of their lives, as well as the most profound expression of their culture. At the age of 18, and in preparation for marriage, the Kogi initiate is gifted the ritual implements for the chewing of coca, their yoburu (gourd) and lime-stick, by the mamas/shamans. An initiate is also gifted a mochila/coca bag by his wife-to-be, woven from thread gifted by the mamas. For the Kogi men, the first bittersweet taste of hayo (coca) brings them into manhood. At the marriage ceremony, the mama perforates the yoburu and impregnates the bulbous base of the gourd with lime.

The mamas/shamans of the culture are divined at birth by the throwing of coca leaves, which are then read. If the neophyte is selected, they are then taken deep into the mountain caves and raised the first eighteen years of their life without any exposure to sunlight. At the age of 18, and on a particularly clear day, the mama is brought out into the sunlight and tastes hayo for the first time. Wrapped up in symbols of re-birth and the maternal matrix, the chewing of coca is—for the Kogi—the recreation and genesis of the cosmos as they know it.

2/10/2009 Písaq, Peru

*‘Though the path before me
stretches clearly;
and long the winding road
that leads me;
each step I make
hence follows surely:*

*Crux Mea Stella
The Crossroads are my Star.
—Ol’ poem of mine, dictated by my
dead Uncle Buster from beyond the grave.*



Crossroads

We bussed earlier today from Cusco eastwards to the small Andean village at Písaq. The bus ascended perhaps 1000 feet from Cusco (at 10,000 feet), and then descended 3000 feet more to the Urubamba river valley. On the bus ride, I was quickly engaged in broken Spanish conversation by an elderly artisan from the Peruvian city of Huancayo.

He pointed out the various animals, introduced me to his wife and agreed that I should follow him into the Písaq market to view his artwork. Little did I know that I would then be obligated to make a purchase, though I might have expected it, and it was beautiful nonetheless: a carved gourd with images of the sacred valley engraved upon it. Images of the Inca and valley gracing the surface: sun and moon; serpent, puma, and condor (some trinity of sacred totemic Andean animals); machu picchu and

scenes of traditional agricultural practices of the valley. As we descended into the Urubamba valley, we saw for the first time the terraces/tarrazas of the Inca.

The coca in Písaq seems better than Cusco—larger, unbroken leaves—and the cholco/corn is a meal unto itself, far superior to the corn in the United States.

2/11/2009 Ollantaytambo, Peru

Imagine

—John Lennon

A soft wind blows warmly up the crevasse perpendicular to the sacred valley where Ollantaytambo is situated. I think we will spend several days here; I'm quite moved by the people and the pace of life here. An even gentler wind blows through my soul this evening as we watch the sun set over this splendor of a valley. After our arrival by colectivo from Písaq via Urubamba, we made our way through labyrinthine chasms of stone and soil, skipping over drainage rivulets from off the mountain stream of the Montana de Santa Marta.

Gazing up the crevasse eastwards up the valley of the Santa Marta, an immense calm suffuses my body and oft-weary heart. There is a sense of sacred space here, perhaps in the heart of the people up this valley. I feel myself being drawn up the valley, drifting in a world of folk reveries and smiling faces, dark skinned and hiking up the valley with ease . . . to be here is to feel human again.



Tambo Cacti



Pisac Road

2/12/2009 Ollantaytambo, Peru

*The connection to the friend
is secret;
and very fragile.*

*The image of that friendship
is in how you love,
the glances,
the subtle talking together
and full prostrations.*

*Outside of time, REMEMBER
the fierce courtesy
of the One with you.'*
—J'alalludin Rumi

Our second day in Ollantaytambo, and we moved to the Quilla lodge. The man who runs the lodge—same age as myself—invited us up the adjacent valley from yesterday's reveries, and into the mountains for a fiesta of sorts. The event was described to us as a "reunion" of the folk peoples of the upper mountain area with the peoples of the lower valley. There was dancing, music, and maize beer, as well as—amidst the festivities—the occasional firing of a large canon that reverberated with an immense boom down the valley. In the first dance, the dancers were dressed in something like ornate green pajamas, faces masked, and were brandishing whips, which they would snap around the feet of the dancers in front of them; this went on in a circle to the delight of everyone watching. In the second dance, men brandishing bright orange frocks in the traditional Andean style waved a white sash back and forth at one another, a dance imitating some manner of Andean swan, perhaps the very mythological swan that by day escorted the Sun and Moon children sent from Lake Titicaca to populate the earth at the bequest of the Incan creator deity Wiracocha.

We walked up the hills to one of the many small agricultural settlements along the mountainside, our guide pointing out the various cultivated plants: several varieties of potatoes with flowers of several colors, peas, and several varieties of plants unfamiliar to me. Our guide's spurious grip on English was only matched by my similar grip of Spanish. Somehow we managed to communicate and I learned a couple of new words in Spanish (key=*llave*; church bell=*campana*; peas=*abbas*; trek=*caminata*). We ate amidst the festivities, and then walked the long road back to Ollantaytambo, perhaps 4 miles. More than I have walked in some time.



Fiesta de la Montana

2/14/2009 Ollantaytambo, Peru

Pain is your shell breaking open
—Kahlil Gibran



Cactus in Ollantatabo

Two nights back I again chewed coca all night, a substantial quantity; the coca in Ollantaytambo is large-leafed and seems less potent than that in Písaq. Towards the morning, I had something of a psychological-emotional breakthrough.

I'm truly impressed with this plant; it is as powerful a plant as I have ever experienced. In the early hours, I began walking through emotion-states that have been particularly difficult for me in the last several years. The emotion states were like layers around a central core psychological-emotional challenge. First I was going through anxiety, a mental state that I have a tendency to quickly identify with. I often seem to need something to worry about. With the coca, I was able to take a step back and recognize a certain set of behaviors as being rooted in this anxiety, and simply experienced the anxiety as such. Then I saw that the anxiety was one layer of a deeper state of suffering, and the anxiety itself opened up. It became clear to me that my seeming need for anxiety, and something to worry about, was part of a mechanism protecting me from being overwhelmed by

despair. This despair and sadness appeared to be largely rooted in childhood imprints, and was wrapped into a gestalt of emotions that I believe are at the core of why it is that I have had so much trouble honing in on a career. In essence, I experience a sense of sadness and intense frustration in not being able to “earn” my mother’s love.

For children, maternal love is the ultimate currency and value, and I suspect the basis for most human values. Freud and Jung were perhaps not amiss in referring to the mother-child relationship as the basis for what they termed “object libido,” or the central axis about which pleasure seeking behavior—as an effort-reward mechanism—revolves. We cry for our mothers, and this behavior is reinforced by the pleasure of being fed. As we grow older, this basic reward system becomes much of how our work ethic evolves: we work for our mother’s love because our mother’s love is our own biological survival. This love then becomes the object of the libido by which we come to enjoy work as something pleasure bestowing and of intrinsic value. Reflecting on my upbringing, I saw that I worked very hard—according to my nature—to be an object of my parent’s love, and specifically my mother’s. It simply never happened, so I have associated work and goal-motivated effort (the object libido) with a sense of frustration that believes—at an unconscious level—that my best effort simply doesn’t matter.

So I put in my best effort with the unconscious assumption that it is ultimately valueless, with the inevitable consequence that I never really see anything all the way through. In fact, if I were to see something all the way through, it would be all the more disappointing to once again realize and recognize that unlovable and frustrated child within me. As a result, over the years I’ve tended to view practical work with some amount of disdain. These insights seemed very “matter of fact” at the time, and were not the product of any real “thinking through” of what I was feeling. They seemed to proceed naturally from the simple act of feeling these very difficult emotional states in their wholeness. The focus on effort-reward is quite interesting, as I’ve been told that cocaine works within the “pleasure-reward”

systems of the brain (perhaps I'm wrong). It's further interesting that coca is typically anthropomorphized as feminine, "mama" coca. In a sense, this particular plant seems to be acting as a sort of surrogate mother in an unforgiving landscape.

Beyond this basic system of imprints, I came in touch with an overwhelmingly intense sense of existential insecurity that seemed to have a cosmic dimension to it; it felt as though an immense and vibrating current was surging from my solar plexus into the heart area. This current was marked, physical and quite strong. I felt like it might shake me to pieces; it became quite clear at this point that attachment to the physical and emotional forms was going to create a lot of suffering. So I just let go, my fontanelles seemed to flare out and through the heart center coursed massive amounts of biographical suffering, years of anxiety, despair and frustration spilling through my heart in a compressed and ultra-intense gush. This must

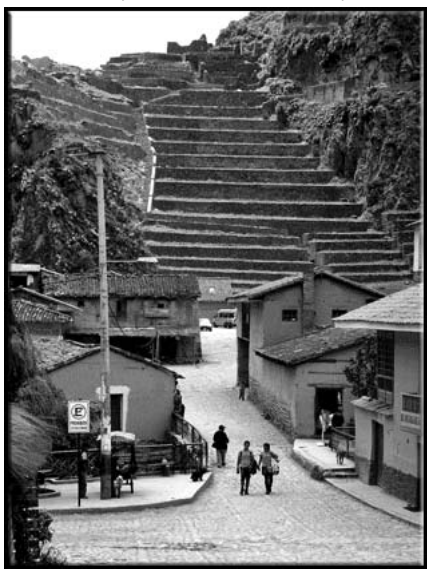
have lasted 20 or 30 minutes, and was quite unsettling; it was like all of my pain took on an objectified form and just poured out of my body. My mind swimming, I kept breathing my way through it, trying to relax and continuously reminding myself that this was part of the healing effect of the coca medicine. Eventually, it passed and I was left with a sense of solidity and clarity in my heart. Since this opening, I truly have felt considerably more capable of dealing with uncertainty and stress; there have been several situations that previously would have caused me considerable anxiety, and they have most definitely been much easier to deal with. The plant itself seems quite therapeutic, though it almost seems like electro-shock therapy at the higher doses (this is definitely a stimulant). Certainly one of the more powerful psychological-emotional openings I have ever had. The llipta-lime in the markets here in Ollantaytambo is incredibly caustic, a small piece will burn the heck out of one's mouth. The best llipta I've had was a sweet anise paste in Písaq, quite pleasant. The llipta here *es mucho fuego*, it's a bit much.

Today we crossed the Urubamba river and hiked up to a relatively pristine set of Inca terraces. With the entire canyon to ourselves, the terraces were small and apparently used to grow "los plantas medicas y aromatica por la templo" (medical and aromatic plants for the temple) Past the terraces was a temple nested within a cave complex, with two main iconic artifices. One, a doorway carved into the stone was described as a "doorway into another dimension;" the other, a stone altar with a set of Incan crosses upon it used for prayer and reflection. We were told "es un sitio sagrado," that this was a "sacred place" used to reflect on and pray to "Pachamama."

There is a very tall grouping of *Trichocereus pachanoi* in flower on the western side of the central plaza, perhaps the tallest pachanoi I have ever seen. Cultivated specimens are quite common up the valley, including Cusco. Typically, in the



Cactus in Bloom



Tambo Terrace

higher elevations, these specimens seem to have been grown from thick cuttings that are clearly sourced from some other locale; while the root cuttings are often quite thick, the pups tend to grow quite thin indicating a lack of sufficiently intense sunlight. I suspect these cultivated pachanois in Cusco are brought inside during the wintertime, so they don't receive much sunlight. However, at the lower elevation here in Ollantaytambo, the cultivated specimens look quite healthy and are planted directly into the ground. There is a trichocereus or cereus species endemic to this area that I've been told is not psychoactive; a shame, as it's EVERYWHERE.

2/16/2009 Aguas Caliente, Peru

*The soul is here
for its own joy.
—J'alalludin Rumi*

We arrived by train from Ollantaytambo at the station at Aguas Caliente, the pueblo below Machu Picchu. Both Gratefulbear and I have been dealing with some stomach upset—it was bound to happen—and today we mostly seem to be resting. Gratefulbear has slept most of the day. The train ride itself—though exorbitantly priced by my now-lowered standards—was quite extraordinary. Leaving just before dawn, we descended from the arid climate of the valley south of Ollantaytambo into what is essentially a cloud forest. Continuing further up the Sacred Valley, plant species began proliferating exponentially: large swaying trees hosting epiphytes tucked into niches, creeping vines, a thick mat of floor covering. Intermittently, the train would pass through fields of the most peculiar varieties of flowers, an infinite gradient of shadings from purple to blue to red to pink. The jungle is near, perhaps a day away. Brugmansia arborea seems prevalent in both the arid southern part of the sacred valley and here in the cloud forest. In the arid upper valley I only saw orange and white flowers; here in the cloud forest, there is a peachish-pink variety of Brugmansia in flower.

Machu Picchu pueblo itself is afloat with tourism, overpriced with the layout of the city—though small—contributing to a sense of crowdedness. Everything is built upwards on a small embankment of the Urubamba River; the locals seem to have crammed as much marketable economy as is possible into this small space. While the one redemption of this little pueblo is the audible sound of the river from each and every point within it, it often appears as if the entire little town might just fall into the water and be carried downstream into the jungle.

The fascination with Machu Picchu is interesting in itself, the town here below the ruin: an enigma. On the one hand, the locals clearly rely on tourism. On the other, I have found that the residents seem to find tourists rather annoying. Somehow I don't blame them. It's one of the defining drives of long-term travel, that we're somehow looking for something that connects us to a place. But this place is a drive-by, and I think somehow a lot of us here are in the driver's seat.

The emphasis on Machu Picchu—as a tourist destination—is unusual in the sense that while Hiram Bingham's original theory posited that Machu Picchu was the “hidden kingdom of the Inca”—their last stronghold during the time of the Conquest—recent evidence has pointed to the overgrown jungle site at Espiritu Pampa as the probable stronghold of the fabled city of Vilcabamba. So what is it about Machu Picchu that so fascinates people? Aside from its apparent beauty, what I can tell of Machu Picchu says something about the simple beauty of a thing revealed in its natural state. At the ruins there are no choking creepers or tangles of trees, just raw and exposed clarity. I think there's an intrinsic and ineffable beauty to discovering something completely revealed in its original and untouched state. Chalk it up to “magical thinking,” but sometimes you get the sense that the world has been waiting for you to see it.

Also, I think that Bingham's story of the search for that which was hidden and lost appeals to our natural romantic. I suspect that most of us are somehow romantic in the original sense, however

lost we may be to ourselves. So I figure I'll keep this in mind as I become part of the drove of tourism passing through this region. Perhaps I'm only here to see something naked and beautiful; something lost that is now found; something that was hidden that is now revealed.

The coca here is the most unique of any I have yet tested; it is substantially more potent, with smaller and more delicate leaves. It has a very pleasant and sweet caramel aroma to it, which gives it a rich taste. The llipta-lima is quite mild in terms of causticity. Perhaps owing to the lack roads between here and Ollantaytambo to the south, the source of this coca seems to likely be regions “a la frontera de la selva” (on the borders of the jungle) to the north. I suspect the coca in the markets to the south of Ollantaytambo is coming from fields that are at a lower elevation to the south of Cusco towards Arequipa; the leaves are much larger and have a smell somewhere between hay and green tea.

We have decided to continue north out of the valley—instead of heading back to Cusco—and make our way to the jungle, with the hopes of finding a plane to Pucallpa or perhaps just a river boat. Tomorrow, we will visit Machu Picchu, both Gratefulbear and myself are glad this particular leg of our trip—which was sort of obligatory—will soon be over. Tomorrow, after the hike up to Machu Picchu, we will be heading to Quillabamba where we plan on acquiring supplies *para la selva*.

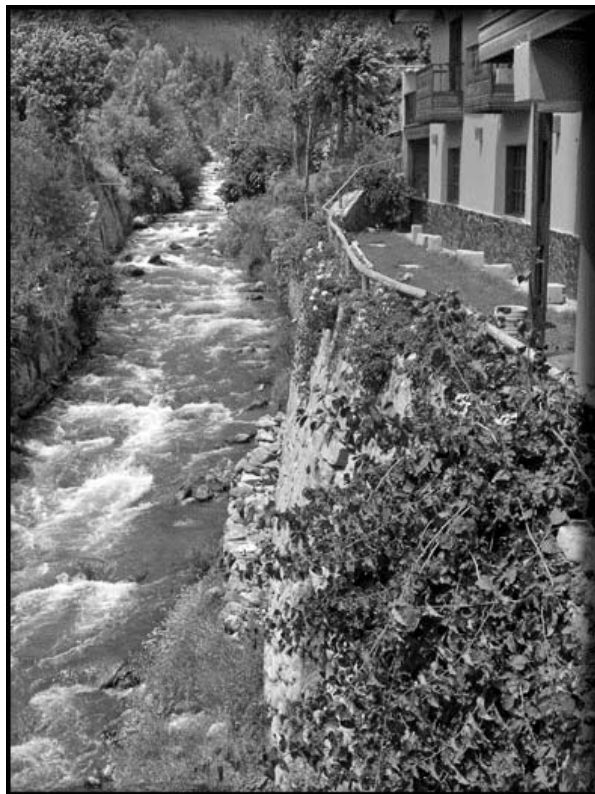
This afternoon, Gratefulbear and I became feverish with whatever stomach bug we've picked up. Coupled with the fatigue, I figured it was time to give ourselves the C-bomb: 500mg Ciprofloxacin, a staple of the traveling medical kit. Within a half hour, we were worlds better. In retrospect, I suspect some of my anxiety in the early part of the week had something to do with this stomach bug. I think I can tend to be particularly tuned in to my gut, I just had a “gut feeling,” as my father used to say. But we feel much better now, hopefully well enough to find the ruins tomorrow after a strong dose of yogurt. I REALLY need a book to read.

2/17/2009 Aguas Caliente, Peru

*Remember when you were young,
you shone like the sun.
Shine on you crazy diamond.
—Pink Floyd*

Today it rained all day, starting early in the morning. We decided not to visit the ruins as a result. Instead, we made our way up to the hot springs for which this town has taken its original name. The main street leads up through town and above to an estuary of the Urubamba River. Crossing a bridge, we ascended to the bathhouse, which was composed of a bar overlooking a set of terraced bathing pools of various temperatures. I laughed when we came within hearing distance of the bar, as blaring out over the speakers was Pink Floyd's “Wish You Were Here.” Some background is perhaps in order.

While traveling in India, I briefly took residence at a hostel near the burning ghats in Varanasi—or what is now Banares—by the name of the Shiva Lodge, a place highly recommended by the *Lonely Planet* guide. Of



Stream

course, every hostel in India is named the Shiva Lodge. After my first night in Banares—during which my underwear was stolen—I walked out of the hostel to the familiar twang of “Wish You Were Here” being played by a young Indian boy no older than 10—

So, so you think you can tell: heaven from hell

I sat down grinning. He handed me the guitar and I played out the opening lead. We talked for a while about music; he played tabla and I wanted to learn sitar. I met his parents and, to make a long story short, I moved into the small room they had situated on the roof. After I had paid for a month, the father took me upstairs and handed me a club: “this is for the monkeys when you need to use the restroom.” The restroom involved a walk across the exposed monkey-covered roof.

After a couple of days it came to my attention that the father of the household made part of his income through the selling of hashish and opium to the tourists and foreigners that frequented the Shiva Lodge. Having never tried opium, and fancying myself a connoisseur of exotic experiences, I immediately purchased several grams of hashish and a 10-gram ball of the glistening black opium. I then proceeded, over the course of the next two weeks, to ingest epic quantities of hashish via the smoked as well as oral routes—as well as ingesting the opium on a daily basis. I bought a beautiful sitar for the equivalent of 100USD, began taking lessons, and found a spot just off the ghats where I received several hours of yoga instruction per day. Once a week, our yoga teacher did what he called “laughing yoga,” which entailed the ingestion of bhang and eruptions of laughter as we sat in a circle—

did they get you to trade your heroes for ghosts

During my time in India I had a special fondness for the Cat Stevens’ album *Tea for the Tillerman*, and listened to it almost constantly. So one afternoon I’m sitting in my room on the roof, having smoked hashish and a good amount of opium, listening to ol’ Cat, and the album comes to the second to last track, “Father and Son.” Quite suddenly, I become overwhelmed with a powerful sensation from my gut that’s telling me “you need to get rid of all the hash, opium, and paraphernalia right now,” so I cross the roof and flush it all, and head downstairs for dinner. The wife brings me my simple dinner of chapati, dhal, and rice; we eat, and they turn on the television for what became a daily ritual for us: watching the Indian equivalent of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*—

we’re just two lost souls swimming in a fishbowl, year after year

Partway into the show, a young Indian man ducks through the hole of a door into the living room, and he and the father walk into the back kitchen area for business. So I’m sitting against the wall, watching TV, and the young man comes out and makes towards the door. As soon as his head peaks out the front door, he’s slammed back from the doorway in an explosive gust of uniforms, clanging guns, and screaming police. Both the young man and father are pinned to the floor, and they’re being asked questions and smacked in tandem. I’m pegged up against the door as they’re asked questions—

how I wish you were here

They then take me upstairs and search all of my bags. Finding nothing, they leave as quickly as they arrived—and it’s just me and the wife. I’m on a train to Bodhgaya that night, where the Buddha was said to have attained enlightenment. I arrive in Bodhgaya on New Year’s Day (seeing the Bodhi tree is a story for another time).

Over the years I think a lot of people have viewed this intuitive dimension of my personality as pathological, schizotypal, “magical thinking”; I’ve been diagnosed a fair amount over the years

by various people, but ultimately have a deep and abiding faith in my basic sanity, intelligence, and fundamental vision. Personally, I think a lot of people simply tend to lack imagination, an appreciation for the intuitive, ultimately lacking the sort of common sense that lives from the heart.

So the most of today we spent languoring in the hot springs as the clouds drizzled from above over the semi-tropical environment of the cloud forest. Tomorrow, we'll find the ruins.

2/18/2009 Machu Picchu, Peru

*in a world full of people only some want to fly,
isn't that crazy?*

—Seal

I must say that, while I had some reservations about all the tourism and hype surrounding the ruins at Machu Picchu, it really is “all that,” an unbelievable place. We awoke at 5 am, and were ready for the bus at 5:30, having been told you cannot miss the sunrise. I awoke with some residual stomach illness and, after several days of poor sleep and illness, my mood was fairly depressed. Crossing the river and winding our way up to the ruins we entered the park shortly before sunrise to a spectacular and clear view from the guard house above the central ruin. As the sun rose, an immense cloud of fog lifted from the lush and wet valley below, shrouding the entire ruin in a veil of mist. We walked along a trail leading up and away from the central ruin, photographing both specimens of *Brugmansia candida*, and a most unique wild orchid (the first wild orchid I have ever seen).



Picchu Morning

As the mist baked off and the view cleared once again, we made our way to the central ruin. Still a bit depressed and more than a little turned off by all the tourists, we made our way down to an inaccessible section of the ruin. Descending steep stairways and climbing across rocks, we found a bluff overlooking the valley in front of a sort of cave and sat for several hours well out of the sight of any tourists. I began to pray for guidance, for happiness and healing for friends and family, and asked for some sign: a symbol of orientation.

Suddenly, in a hurricane of feathers from the empty space of the valley, swoops in a quite large bird—perhaps two feet tall—and no more than six feet away from where we're sitting. We sit motionless, a bit shocked; I take a close look at this bird. Black with a white breast, orange billed with a downward hook-shape to it. Suddenly, I recognize this bird as the very bird that was described as “toucan-like” in my coca vision in Cusco. He hops even closer, and we simply stare at one another for perhaps 20 minutes; he seemed very interested in us and was perhaps only hungry, but it was a striking experience having never personally been so close to such a large bird. As we sat there looking into one another's eyes, I felt a wind of energy rising from my heart: an ineffable sense of connectedness and meaning. Life, naked and beautiful—that very life which endures beyond our little lives, the great life which we are part of. I grab my camera to take a picture, press the shutter button, and the camera dies

right then and there!!

The sense of living within sacred space is quite pronounced at Machu Picchu, the lateral view dominated by that space which is hemmed in by the surrounding mountains. Wet and lush, the sound of rushing water down below. At the center sits a stone described as the “sun teather,” ostensibly used to orient the peoples of Machu Picchu in their relationship with the sun. The carved stone marks the course of the sun along the horizon from summer to winter solstice; an angled cut at the base of precisely 13 degrees, which just so happens to be the declination of Macchu Pichu in degrees south of the equator (speculative, magical, schizotypal thinking anyone?).

Needless to say, my malaise has lifted; something seems to be drawing us onwards. The “sun teather” metaphor strikes me as a most beautiful one, in the mystical sense of a natural symbol. For people who have been traditionally migratory, the activity of thread making and weaving seems to take on an almost religious significance. Aside from the material necessities of migratory cultures—which tend to practice animal husbandry and herding—the activity of travel and migration seems to weave a common thread across the planet, tethers one to the great and abiding icon of humankind: the earth, the “great mountain.”

About a year and a half ago, Gratefulbear and I tested a new batch of Golden Teacher cubensis. Taking what we considered a moderate dose at 2 grams, we settled in front of the altar with the expectation of a mild experience. Lighting a candle and some incense, I picked up my drum and began to sing and pray. I’m not a particularly theistic person, but singing and sound is an extraordinary medium for directing the psilocybin trance—and while I don’t tend to pray to anything particular, the simple act of deliberate and positive thought has been useful for me. As the visions began to surge, it became clear that this wasn’t going to be your average mushroom experience. With the rhythm of the drum and the descending rain of song, I quickly fell into that lucid and dreaming trance state of which I am so familiar. I remember circling in flight over an immense mountain; I remember a cave at the base of that mountain.

Gratefulbear describes another scene altogether: “I looked into your drum—there was a mountain in your drum. At the base of the mountain is a hole and there is a rope coming out of the hole. The rope is strung through your throat and as you sing there are souls that are climbing up out of the hole; as they emerge from the hole they sigh in relief. I’m watching these people climb out of the hole, and follow the rope up. I look at your face—it is completely transformed. I then notice that your body is glowing, a blue color: cyan. I then suddenly see that behind you is a pair of wings.” I’ll never forget when she said this: “Chris, you had WINGS! you had WINGS! The blue color flares, and your wings spread. Then you look at me and say ‘it’s time for you to be alone,’ lift up off the ground and fly out of the room.” She describes a sense of feeling incredibly alone and descending into a place of no-escape.

I came to several hours later on the other side of the house, with little memory of the experience. For an hour or two more, I could not see my own body. I could viscerally feel that I was embodied; I simply could not visually see my body. I kept asking Gratefulbear to show me where my body was, and where she would touch I would see something like a ripple of water. Eventually as I was waving my arms in front of me, I could discern a vague blur; my body perception slowly came back. But the rope image, the common thread/tether, was particularly interesting in this experience, and it’s a theme that I continue to encounter.

That next week we took the mushroom again at the same dose. At the peak of the effects we both discern a sound, alien and metallic. Gratefulbear becomes uncomfortable. I tune into the sound and suddenly there’s a scene unfolding. I’m on the top of a temple, and there’s a rope extending from the top of the temple into a sort of hole up above; it’s like the sun, but it’s also dark. It begins to flicker rapidly like a candle and suddenly I’m in the trailer that Gratefulbear and her sister grew up in their first two or so years. You enter through the doorway. To the right is a kitchenette with a table extending outwards. There’s a sitting area to the left of the kitchenette. There’s a hallway to the left with a room

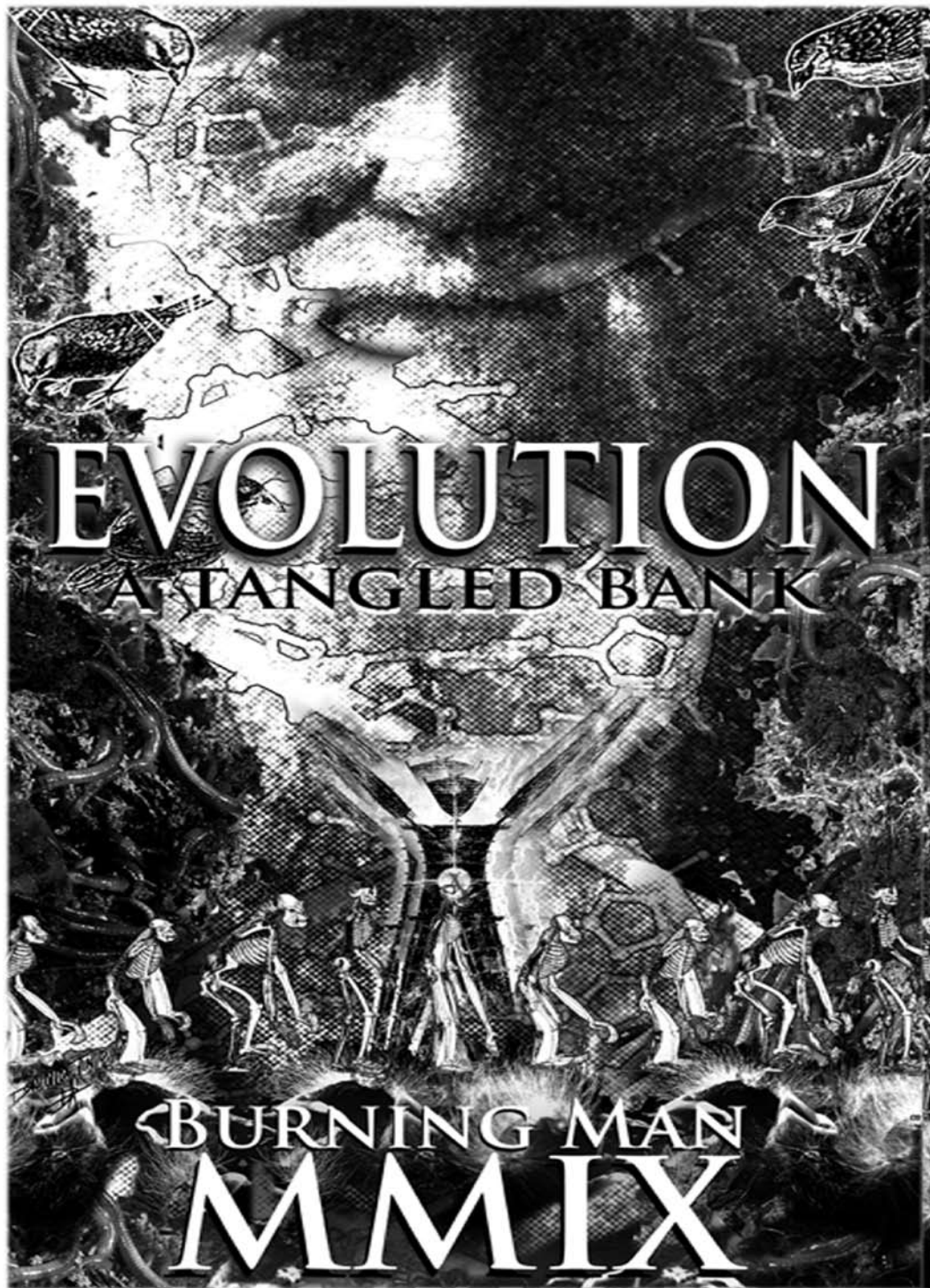
in the back. In each room, there are scenes of unhappiness—they're sort of embedded into the space that I'm seeing, which is itself empty. What was unique about how this scene unfolded was that it wasn't something that unfolded in a serial sequence, but rather that it was something that was intuited in its completeness as a single perception. Like how you'd generally view a painting: there was no real "processing" of the information, it was presented in a pre-processed and holistic form. It was just all there like some sort of pre-cognitive intelligence field.

Enough drug-tales for the day, we're heading back to Cusco tomorrow as a landslide has taken out the route between Aguas Caliente and Quillabamba. We'll have to find some other route to the jungle, preferably a flight.

* * * * *



Montana



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Many Musics

(Fourth Series)

*“Why are we here? Because we’re here.
Why does it happen? Because it happens.
Roll the bones. Roll the bones.”*
—Rush, “Roll the Bones,” 1992.

i. Psychedelic Dream

You won’t know it by name, &
therefore hesitate to call it home.
You will slide about, the music &
shine sloshing around, the words
sticking deep then smile letting go.
The night will deepen, full moon
crack wider, stars jingle with a
leering brightness. Cosmos shivers.

You will wish to know more, marvel
at how much you are marvelling.
That pretty girl dancing. That old man
talking to the trees. Those shakers
& drummers rising that bonfire, what
years pass! What lets go. What resists.
A moment comes, without wind,
without cold. Passes, a regret, an instruction.

When the light moves in again, a stirring
in the many slumbers, some of the mystery
retreating, a recession in heart’s long night
fever not sharply recked by your science
or your god, let memory’s best ear come forth,
let your deepest song cry out, “This is,
this is, this is & ever is!” Let it cut,
let it stain, let it ever sheer a bit
from the claims of daylight & its men.

ii. Two Men Die in Bank Bombing

This morning there was a moment—
before you woke, before we planned,
before the tools were packed & the truck
gassed up—

There was a moment, a memory of
that day with the case of MGD & football
all day on the TV—lousy fucking Broncos—
That—and the strip club—you bought me
a whore—she laughed when we were alone
& pushed her fat titties in my face—
I was 18, smacking her around a little
made me feel good, better than cumming
in that used hole of hers—I had to think
of a cheerleader I'd banged a week before—
no condom & her a blonde begging virgin—
but you'd bought me a whore like your
daddy had done when you were 18 &
really were cherry—and I told you later
it felt good, I was a man now &
understood better what a man feels & why—
You laughed & said I'd be cracking younger,
better poon in no time—I'd paid that
old bitch an extra fifty to make sure
the old man heard her moans & whimpers
out in the hall where he sat smoking weed—

There was a moment, Pops, I haven't
called you that since I was 8 & you were
falling down drunk trying to teach me how
to throw a football like John Elway—
a moment, Pops, when I wish we could
have *fucking stopped*—figure out some
other way to get the money, to get back
at the sorry sonsabitches who put that
green metal box in our hands & that
bank as our goal. A moment, Pops,
when I would have given everything
to go back to the night of my 18th
birthday, watered drink after watered
drink, the ugly fists full of g-string cash on
every side of me, & the fat whore,
come on in, Pops, let's pay more & do her
together, & again, let's the three of us
get so fucking high we laugh & never leave this dirty bed.

iii. To An Unknown Lover

Cry out to your next lover, as you lay
there nude & loose in your bed, step onto
your porch like other full moons, the night's
chill touch not enough, not a man's big
hands, his laugh, his plea, the way each
one moves inside you differently & new,
at least for awhile, til your mind lingers
to another, to several, to how that
might feel, & one day your bed has
been empty for months, & awhile it's
OK, there's the spiny purple toy & the new
pink electric one, the movies with shiny
cocks & bad music, there's the men online
& then on the phone, fucking them by voice
alone, figuring out their dirty shames &
digging in to them deep, & then the phone
is dead & the night remains & you didn't
cum again & all you can do lying nude & loose
is to cry out to the universe. Cry out!
Something may listen, may heed, may give you a piece back.

iv. Lullaby

I was hurt & angry & my pain
 was belittled or unnoticed for years.
 A poor youth but happy, the rest a
 heart's carnage of years, want & beauty
 in wild mixture. I cry this to you
 tonight because you feel it too, & may reply.

v. Inaugurate

How deep the poison's wild mixture
 in our blood, want & music, how high
 to reck the endless woods yearn through all?
 World's puzzle disintegrates, reinvents
 every hour, while many a man through
 centuries will smile & think its formula
 cornered in a doorway, close, so close,
 soon to know, to tell all, till a slip,
 or a jingle, or a thousand black wings
 up & beyond that spire. Little answer
 to this world but each touches each &
 a mystery runs through all, now the hungry
 woman who smokes in solitude's juices in
 a bed that remembers twined nights of
 blood & despair, now two tribes will war unto
 annihilation for possession of a dead god's
 graveyard, now a brave man who jolts
 the world with its own abandoned possibilities.

vi. Steep

What else but the stink of old ideas &
 ancient demons, enemies unseen in flesh
 for decades? What else? I am a creation
 tonight of dead days, long loyalties, old breaks.
 What then is tonight's chance, its reason,
 its reward? A craft or planet hung low
 in the sky when the fog passed through
 & mystery descended into the streets,
 spiked the talk outside bars & coffee houses.
 The sky's shroud pushed the question
 nearer, no evasion by a wondering gesture
 to the stars. What else but the old stink?
 Not by faith, not by love, not by any reason
 to lean on & walk the streets, both clash
 & partner men in the market place. No.
 It's a peace unfound, a victory to gift those worst days.

vii. Stink

A daze, a dream of beauty, hard world
 cracks before this dance, & praise
 where there had been stunted gestures.
 Wait. Start again. A daze, dream of beauty,
 the world a waste, spark it new, now
 time itself will burn. Wait. Start again.

viii. Dream of Beauty

Cry out! Something may listen, may heed,
 may give you a piece back. Would you
 have younger blood & bones, a lighter question
 of God astride your heart? Another chance
 to breach that cherry cunt with less reverent
 words, surer touch? Does love teach best
 by variety, excess, or absence? What would
 you have back, which moment, what word?
 Another hour with the dead, another with
 youth's lost brothers, another with a pen
 & a book, hours raising music in that
 shadowy green courtyard? What's broken,
 what's gone, what beliefs simple & discarded,
 only dreams, death, & a surprising hour return anything.

ix. Surprising Hour

High on labyrinth, a dream of beauty,
 endless desert to go, a daze,
 a drink of moonlight in an hour
 of despair. High, on labyrinth,
 a dream, of beauty, endless desert
 to go, a deep drink of moonlight,
 another hour of despair. High.
 On labyrinth, a dream, beauty of
 endless desert, to go. Now breathe.
 Will it come again & never, never know.

x. Deep Drink of Moonlight

There had been the day's now-forgotten
 politics, excitement of a new film,
 a recently found constellation. Usual
 movement of men & beasts. Night came,
 this was years or decades ago, yet still
 the same chaos, music of starlight
 on earth, her face. Her voice on lost
 matters, the nearing moment she would leave.

Years or days from now alike, it was
 love's ceaseless glaring pitch that killed me.

xi. Ceaseless Glaring Pitch

The way is dis-illusion, til bones &
 bloodless in the earth, or dust &
 free upon the wind. All crooning
 together, nobody & nobody & nobody
 alike, past life's many stinks &
 its surprising hours too, its dreams
 of beauty, its movements of men &
 beasts. Beyond labyrinth & desert,
 love's ceaseless glaring pitch, & o
 sure, safe relief! Yet still upon
 this oaken chair, still each a slave
 to his going heart, still asking why
 of books, starlight, seeking it in a preacher's
 cries & a lover's loins. Still here,
 all alone, all suffering, yes. And yet.
 Down that dark street, a murmur,
 a reply. For all gone, all yet to come,
 what was just said? In that shadow? Just now?

xii. Down That Dark Street

*“He who makes a beast of himself
gets rid of the pain of being a man”
—Samuel Johnson*

A dream of beauty, on long nights,
hard world cracked before this dance,
I knew better each day this world
a lie, yet fell with breathless croaking
want to this dream, its endless dance.
Come the weird years & their many
miles, I fall again & again through new
uncaught musics to a hard lovely
place I know only through distance, memory,
absence, impossible stuff of happiness & forgetting.

xiii. Accumulation

Anguish decades old burning still
in me, distant hours throbbing for
a sate I cannot offer, nor lover
nor elixir give; small ulcered
cataclysms, hungry loins, hungry starlight,
damages to the world because I suffered &
yet sing. The waste I shape to song.

Yet each new day will beg its childly
due, little knowing every previous,
uncaring all that was lost years ago,
how the bastards laughed & moved on.
Got old, or got God, or fell on their
own thorn on hard hour & sure would
give me or any other a hand now.

New days come & still matter, wildly
matter, new bastards too, & lure
with me with weird musics beyond
my deep corrosion's will to douse them.

xiv. Some Blues

Which will let go first, the bones, the blood,
 the breath? Or the belief that tomorrow
 might surprise, blow up in new hunger &
 novel sate? Hurry & slow of hours, next mile,
 I wonder at my strange, ragged fingernails &
 the unknowable torsos colliding around me.
 What persists is the murmuring slow drizzle
 from places my heart yet distantly dwells.

xv. Urban Pastorate

The lunchroom preacher talked of God
 & the devil, the one of open hands
 & mystery, the other of lure & craft,
 & his ragged listeners nodded & ate
 the food he'd bought them all. Paused, stood,
 he leaned over another, snoring boozy
 in his seat. Preacher held his hand,
 fetched him food too. The man took the
 sandwich, ate sloppily in a half doze,
 neon & liquor colliding his mind. Preacher
 smiled, collected phone numbers from those
 with phones, departed with a straight back.
 The ones remaining grumbled, nodded off again,
 til the lunchroom manager emerged, pointed to the door.

xvi. Drizzle

Said nothing goes away, nothing returns,
yet the bastards between the beats & breaths
would will we live otherwise. Two clashing whys
for every blow, every bloom, the long hungry
cries of a thousand distant nights. Would bid
us believe one hour brimming virgin's eager
juice, purposeful stars, & men untied to
the collected wounds we call history, while
another hour the next step in world's long
story, its perpetual construction by a god
or genome. Yet ask whatever's true but
yearn for truth itself?

I remember a large cat with sickly
yellow eyes, his paws too weak to wave
off my watching, let him die alone. I crouched
in vigil, an hour, part of another, & that
was all. I learned nothing in seeing
him go, neither where he went nor what
I should do next. Was this, I wondered later,
all the lesson there was to get?

xvii. Love's Clasp

Sickly yellow eyes of men's greed,
 men's indifference, scorching fear
 driving one to deny another, consume
 another; yet remove from this an hour
 or more, without time, without news,
 clasp lover, the wet smacking music
 of endless kisses, the needful coupling
 animals know without an art, like
 a drink of sunlight or river water;
 what this world might yet mean
 by a strong enough will, tending sickly
 yellow eyes to health, clasping love
 for powers known & further mysteries
 to broach. All these centuries of men
 & nothing learned? Simplest hungers
 remain unsated? Clasp love deeper,
 heal men's sickly yellow eyes, now,
 see the world without illusion, perfect,
 listen new, hear its clear bells ringing.

xviii. Bides

Cosmos shivers tonight, what possible
 you or I could do? Nod down the border
 to Dreamland, til little & none, shake
 old thighs new & strange. Use some
 other word for want, for love, marry
 that word to a surprising gesture, & now
 what ripple begins that should not; if
 where bound the sealed box or dust on a
 whipping current, the remembering friends,
 the few words, then why not jerk the path
 there, why not steer life's sting outward,
 why not turn that sting's poison to honey,
 why not nod & feed the world its fill?

xix. Shelter

What of these daylight concerns of men,
 the hunger for meat & coin,
 a reaching hand, a breathless word?
 The hour's politics, maps & markets convulse
 & conspire, a few freaks 'demn it foul,
 the rest hold out a bowl.

What then. A man slumps in a dirty red jacket,
 cussing the preacher, the nurses,
 the grey spring hours of his city,
 the need to be helped, the wait.

The wait. His teeth hurt when he shouts,
 yet he shouts again & again.
 "It's a game. A fucking game. Who the hell's winning?"

xx. Revolution is Now

A chandelier, many bookcases, the chairs
 of a slower century, an airless room.
 Sunlight through shaded windows, a body
 prone on the crimson carpets, remembering.

The songs of branches without, melodies
 twined soberly with the careless breeze.
 A car passes, a radio, a shout. The body
 does not move, stilly tries for a place
 beyond movement, beyond choice.

We know what we know by elimination,
 laze toward the yes or no, learn poorly
 the lessons of beat & breath. The silence
 between each is the freedom few remark,
 swathes of unfinished music, rushes of light.

xxi. The Tell of a Bare Thigh

What's prettiest about regret how it folds
 into new forms. Each new blossom dipped
 in an old skin of gifts, hours, what came,
 what didn't. How that day feels now,
 the ways memories will whore to keep life
 when their lesson & loss have both long wrinkled dry.

xxii. Hope Like Liquor

Watch a tall man, brave, gesture higher,
 brand his words with a blood music
 urge armies to lean back, urge for more room
 in the ship for all. Some brighter course,
 bring closer the promises of men's old gods
 with sweat, hard counsel. Hope,
 the old liquor, how it bites what's young
 in every heart, & another please,
 oh another. Tonight, men are choosing,
 arraying wherever the powerful & the humble
 each meet. The gesture stands plainly,
 how will world's restive blood respond?

xxiii. Humble Path

No less hard fire tonight, dreams still
 burst in crimson juice & exploding time.
 Everything still matters, less & more.
 Hunger for the next working hour &
 the next climaxing arrival. Sentiment
 is never enough, not bones enough
 to bridge the years' long arc. Still
 to walk with a world's wish & my own.

xxiv. Psychedelic Dream (ii)

Arrival is falling, the music lets loose,
 a cascade of faces, these woods go on
 & on, I understand this fire. Here I stand.
 It is years ago, & tonight, & I am buried
 too. Water in my hand, a stranger's
 blithe smile. Grateful I never held
 God in a tome or temple & left the world
 out. Here I stand. I understand this fire.
 Arrival is falling. All the worlds burn tonight.

xxv. All the Worlds Are Burning Tonight

Always another word for want,
 in the tell of a bare thigh, regret's
 many unfinished musics, how some
 hours will not rouse but to a remembered
 voice, scent. And yet others that greed
 for the stupidly, stumblingly possible.

A night, hungry like this one, as familiar,
 as alien, a barely known girl met
 in a theatre, years when I watched all
 with every door open, soft of knowledge,
 hard for learning. I walked home
 that night believing in many worlds.

Someone burned a tenement for the money
 & the theatre went with it too. What
 I've become isn't surprised. What I've become
 believes the girl's memory tastes better tonight
 by how I don't remember her name.

xxvi. Old Gods

Arrival is falling, into the basket,
 into the graveyard. Old gods persist,
 as the moon, because a better bullet,
 a brighter machine, a greater lifetime
 cannot better defense the human heart.

Arrival is falling, into the world,
 into the myths, the ways young ass
 will be molded & sold, which sufferings
 the books & newspapers will soften
 with a song, a pride in the sacrifice.

Old gods persist, young ass will be
 molded & sold, arrival is falling.
 Old gods persist, as do promises
 made by powerful to humble that a
 reckoning to satisfy abacus & soul
 alike, will come, now join in, sing the song!

What's due will come with morning,
 a better tide, & the old bells breaking.

xxvii. A Fucking Game (Love Song)

Loving all the worlds is a hungry garden
 in the heart, wanting water, wanting light,
 wanting the unreasonable imagination,
 what jumbles up new paths to happiness
 when buildings filled with boxes prove
 empty of music, what makes worlds grow.

Loving you, this world among worlds,
 this fucking game, the how is keep moving,
 the why is both full moon & unknown.
 From my dreams on out, my needs some
 not driven by cock or stomach, how
 the old gods teach me nothing, remain near.

A world among worlds, a fucking game,
 the many love songs. The hungry garden's
 many needs will never cease, never sate,
 wanting water, wanting light, wanting
 full moon & the unknown both. From my dreams
 on out, my best long ago & strangely still to come.

xxviii. Ceaseless Song

A blood canvas painted years ago, later
 sold at auction for minor coin, lost when that
 old tenement burned. A ragged man stands,
 center foreground, looking distantly toward
 a temple, hands folded against his chest.
 Nearby a squirrel & a crow war & play.
 They circle round an oak tree until one
 cries & the other breaks for the branches.

He watches, an hour, & part of another,
 the world agitating round him. The temple
 is old, sickly yellow eyes loosed in dark seas
 etched upon its iron doors, the legend above,
 "some eat others" & below, "all the worlds
 burn tonight." This was a dream I'd had,
 when found that morning, whimpering
 of bugs. I wrote this before waking.

Finding the world mapless, its why both
 full moon & unknown, neither men's lies
 nor their truths can finish this song—

xxix. Avenue Dusk

Faces hurry past as leaves fall—
as though destined for somewhere
else than the earth.

xxx. Every Evening's News

A just & peaceful world does not speak
wistful of words like justice & peace.



To be continued in Cenacle | 69 | June 2009

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WITHIN'S WITHIN: SCENES FROM THE PSYCHEDELIC REVOLUTION

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Susan Jones



The Suitcase

[New Fiction]

His name was Oedipus—"Edip" in Russian, pronounced just as in French. He was as big as the table that held Tata Valentina's brass samovar. When freshly brushed, his thick coat glistened with the rich blue hues of the oil puddles in the rutted road from the outskirts of Moscow to Tata Valentina's country dacha. He was generally ill-tempered, though never when Tata Valentina came to see him.

A great black dog of no known breed, Edip had been strong and noble in his youth, and was noble and dignified in his old age. He lived in the flat across the landing from Tata Valentina with his owner, Baba Olga. Tata Valentina visited him almost every day and brought him table scraps. As she conversed with Baba Olga across a steaming cup of Georgian tea with jam, Tata Valentina's eyes met Edip's eyes in lingering looks of mutual understanding.

Tata Valentina loved Edip as much as she loved her own son who had fled Moscow to marry a Latvian girl and never came back to see his mother. She loved Edip more than she loved any of her neighbors, except of course her best friend Baba Olga. At times she felt that she loved Edip even more than Baba Olga loved him. For as the years wore on, Baba Olga talked less of Edip and more of her grandchildren, six of them, four of whom crocheted coin purses for her and carved sturdy wooden figures of ponies and bison that they brought to her when they visited on Sundays.

When the time came for Baba Olga to make the long trip east to see her grandchildren—the two who did not come on Sundays with coin purses and carvings of ponies—she turned of course to Tata Valentina with her request. With sincere pleasure Tata Valentina agreed to take care of Edip during the weeks Baba Olga would be away in far Khabarovsk.

It was not much trouble. Tata Valentina had only to feed Edip, and take him out for his walk in the morning and in the evening. She found herself putting aside the best tidbits from her plate to take to him, to make up for his loneliness. Often she would stay at her friend's flat with the dog for an hour or two at the end of the day, to keep him company and to talk to him of her cares.

Then suddenly, on a rare sunny April day, Edip died. Nothing happened. He didn't even seem sick. Before supper Tata Valentina went to feed him, and she found him lying there on a cracked spot in the kitchen linoleum, as if asleep. He was quite peaceful, but dead.

She didn't know what to do. She couldn't reach Baba Olga, who wouldn't return for a long time still. She felt very sad for her friend, and guilty too because after all she had promised to take care of Edip. And she had no idea what to do with a dead dog.

At first she tried to contact the authorities. But, alas, in Russia seldom is anything accomplished by contacting the authorities. She made some calls, but either the telephone was busy, or no one answered, or if someone did answer, they couldn't tell her where to take the

poor dog to be—as Tata Valentina delicately phrased it—taken care of properly.

She talked to her friends, the few she could confide in. None of them had ever encountered such a problem and could offer no help. So Tata Valentina finally made up her mind to bury the dog herself.

She didn't have much time to think about it. Winter was over and Edip would not wait long. There was no place in Tata Valentina's neighborhood to bury him. Certainly a public park wouldn't do. At last she decided to take Edip to her dacha outside Moscow, beyond the rutted road with its puddles of oil, to bury him there in her garden.

Getting to the dacha was a long trip: first the autobus to the Metro, then two Metro trains with a change between them at Byelorussky Station, then a third long train ride to the countryside, and finally another bus. For the journey Tata Valentina wrapped Edip's body in a worn white and blue tablecloth and put it in an old suitcase. It was heavy. She could carry it only with great difficulty. She had to stop frequently to rest, but, well—Tata Valentina was very determined.

She was also very clever, Tata Valentina. By the time she climbed down from the first bus at the Metro station, dragging the big suitcase behind her, she was exhausted. Her arms ached from Edip's weight. She stopped often to rest and to think. And then she became a bit of an actress.

Approaching the entrance to the Metro, she straightened her shoulders, smoothed back the white hair beneath her kerchief, and became flirtatious, just a little. Her eyes grew clear and for a moment a bloom passed over her withered cheeks. She turned her face toward the pale April sun and smiled as she thought of times past, other trips to her dacha, and loved ones long gone.

Soon a strong young man wearing a leather coat and gold necklace stopped and offered to carry her suitcase. He grinned broadly as he lifted it onto the Metro train for her, and steadied her arm as he rode with her and carried the heavy thing through the long tunnels at Byelorussky Station where they changed trains.

Then it happened. When they boarded the second Metro train, just as the doors began to close, the helpful young man leapt off and back onto the platform, taking the suitcase with him. It was not entirely unexpected. After all, with the passing of the old ways everyone knew how dishonest young people had become.

Tata Valentina raised a big fuss right there in the middle of the crowded Metro car, but there was nothing to be done. The people around her clucked and nodded and agreed: Young men like that are just no good. Mafiosi, no doubt. Thieves are everywhere, in the nicest of neighborhoods. It's no longer safe even to get out of bed. At the next stop Tata Valentina, holding her chin high, got off and turned around to go home.

She struggled to keep the corners of her mouth from curling up, rather pleased with herself, all the way.

The hard part came when Edip's owner, Baba Olga, returned from her trip. Tata Valentina told her about his death, how she found him lying peacefully on the worn linoleum with no sign that anything was wrong. Then she explained about the suitcase and the journey to the dacha that never came to pass because of the young man in the leather coat who ran off with the suitcase.

Baba Olga shed tears into her teacup, but fortunately she understood. Of course she was sorry Edip was gone, without even a proper burial. She loved him after all. But he was

very old and it was his time. In a few months she got another puppy—for the grandchildren, she said.

For a long time Tata Valentina and Baba Olga talked over their Georgian tea about the wicked young man and how he must have felt when he finally got to where he was going and opened the heavy suitcase. Even the suitcase was old and not worth anything, chuckled Tata Valentina. And the tablecloth the dog was wrapped in—nothing but a rag. Just imagine the look on his face!

The two old women agreed. Young men are all fools at heart: one sidelong look from beneath lowered lashes and they'll leap to carry even the heaviest package or shabbiest suitcase. A lady must know when to play the coquette.

As Baba Olga refilled their teacups, Tata Valentina reached down to pet the new puppy. He wiggled around to lick the jam from her fingertips.

* * * * *





Ric Amante

Retrieval

Tonight we take apart the mirrors.
 Assemble before mute silver squares
 and inspect the stream of journeys and faces,
 unpack the suitcase of red skies and storms.

So an old woman with cataracts
 leans into the washbasin
 and dimly sees her first love,
 remembers how his kisses
 tasted of salt and fire.

Or a not yet weary traveler—
 drunk on clarity, short on time—
 peers around a jagged corner
 to sup with a grizzled hawk.

And a child, gleaming in late-day sun,
 careens down an icy embankment
 on a rectangle of cardboard
 into darkening shadows of oak.

All these lives lodge
 for an instant of eternity in sheets of glass
 until they spill out into thirsty eyes—
 so tonight let's take apart the mirrors.

Intimacy

I'll place a ring of better deeds
upon a ledge within my reach
as waves of words and silence
gild and tangle the bedsheets.

And we're five years together now,
closing in on our understanding
of each other's understanding—
willing to dig to find stars.

Last night lying side to side
your breasts and breath close against me
a dialogue in flesh an aura of healing—
dumbstruck anew with love's power.

I can hear the earth turning
when we go to that place of trust—
sense a hush from the core,
feel a shifting of fault lines.
Emerge, knowing nothing,
ready to give more.

Citizen X

Citizen X decides to grant himself a news-freeze,
 to tap into his inner globalism
 and listen and watch
 the booms in his mind,
 the busts in his heart,
 warfare among viscera,
 peace treaties between the senses.
 He becomes an unpaid intern
 studying the effects of sunlight upon water,
 an embedded correspondent
 reporting on the casualties of memory,
 an anonymous blogger
 tapping the keys of self-knowledge
 for an audience of none.
 He realizes the cyclones, genocides,
 scandals, technologies, movements
 will persist without him,
 the decades of investing in facts and figures
 yield the same unknown quantities,
 the agitations and rhapsodies of information
 only dilute his wholeness.
 Yet this isn't blissful ignorance,
 spiritual retreat, solipsism, extremism,
 or wistful self-preservation
 so much as the release of the chattering toxins
 and impertinent vocabularies of the derivative.
 Soon he's singing himself back to the wind,
 dropping smiles in the river,
 returning his dread to the authorities.
 There seems to be nothing to hate anymore;
 the murderers were just ill and lonely.
 The scrapings in his gut may be hunger
 or cancer or the birth of a satellite messiah
 orbiting the earth in righteous streaks.
 And if his lack of engagement leads to lunacy,
 what of it?
 The civic lessons of Citizen X
 are the unmediated gifts
 of white clouds above,
 the full awareness of strange forces without,
 the real news of starlight
 streaming steadily in.

Mote

Naked and twirling
in a skylit attic,
I cut through static,
dance myself to the moment.
Steeped in silence in a loft
of sunbeams, space, grace—
this is my only game.
How I came to be here
wired to admire the steady beauty
of a ravishing, vanishing flight—
praise to that kindness.

Respite

Snow hardens and shines
under a cutting January sun.
On the corner fencepost
a squirrel freezes book-end still;
her playmate spirals up
slashes down a thick oak.
To the rear of the yard
elongated shadows of tree limbs
spread black veins on white powder.
A pair of chickadees
flit and whistle in and out
of a blue wall of sky.
Losing myself to a galaxy of otherness,
happy to be thinking in images again.

Thanks

I glimpse my alcoholic Doppelganger
signaling me from the back of the bus.
Unshaven, mid-twenties, notebook on lap—
a slightly forbidding yet genial presence
blinkerred by metaphysics and wine.
Something good sprang
from the bottles and buses
and books—some harsh ecstasies,
an outsider's edgy faith.
But after the last blackout—
details of which escape me—
barbs of shame rent me like cloth,
fumes of annihilation blinded my eye.
Ordinary stuff—
except this time
there's a woman, a lover, a partner,
a voice to attend in the future.
A messenger, I now think,
who heralds other planets,
a constellation, no doubt,
vast as honesty.



Raymond Souland, Jr.

Why ? [a new fixtion]

(continued)

cxxvii.

All is holiness yet wonder even over this, true, not? Maybe? I look at those who nod & know, what do they possess large in their craw, what is the nature of this certainty, wherefrom?

Does life prove or does a given soul angle his view driven by wish & fear?

A man in a fine goods market, dressed in soft, well-made furs, selects a trinket, no, not that one, his leather wallet thick with spending coin, paper & plastic, & numbers related to his fate tell of land, tell of vehicles, tell of relations to others like him—

Another with a thick marker prepares his bent cardboard sign for begging. He coughs. Someone fed him this morning but, no, not a job, not a paycheck. Fed him with bowls of mercy, pity, he writes

HOMELESS VETERAN
HOME FROM IRAQ
GOD BLESS YOU &
AMERICA, PLEASE HELP

I can explain neither man, nor can you, whatever creature to glance these pages. The first man holds his children with heart-thrilling love, there is no distance between them & him. He hates his boss & yet follows her dictates & whims closely, stays late some weekends to assure her great status, her golden reputation, often while she & her wife are fucking on white sheets strewn with cocaine & whipped cream, loud violent porn roaring from their wall-size TV.

The latter man has beaten up cops on bad drunks, knocked a few teeth out along his way. The military saved him from jail & junk, from the women he likely would have hit & hit again yet what happened? How this world, this day, this street at Christmas time & him hoping for a cot tonight at the shelter & a few bucks in the meantime to afford cigarettes—

How? He's invisible. His sign is truth, some of it. He served over there in that desert nightmare & came home. God Bless America? *Fuck that.* People pass him holding their breath, not wanting to smell him much less touch or talk to him. God Bless America?

He sways, begins to clap, starts to sing in his decent voice the Christmas songs he remembers.

*O come all ye angels
joyful & triumphant
come ye oh come ye
to Bethlehem*

People notice him, his decent voice restores him to at least partial humanity. He sings the verse again trying to remember the rest.

A man crowds past him toward the department store entrance.

"Merry Christmas, Mister."

"Yah."

"We're all brothers. You & me too."

The man stops. Stares at him. Oblivious to his partially blocking the revolving door entrance.

"Are we? You believe that?"

"I have to."

"Are you really a soldier?"

"I was."

"What's it like there?"

"It's almost normal sometimes. The men want jobs. The women want fresh produce. Then bombs hit & everyone turns into animals."

"Should we leave?"

"I don't know. I can't tell anyone what to think."

"What do you think?"

"I think I hoped for more. But I had a paycheck & now I don't. They sent me home."

"Excuse me, sir, you're blocking the entrance."

"We're talking. We're nearly done."

"There's a lot of foot traffic. Just move over there."

"Mister, it's OK. Happy Christmas. Kiss your kids tonight."

"I will call the cops if you refuse to move."

"You're harassing me? I spend enough at this place to own your salary."

The soldier backs away, picks up his knapsack, his sign, his cup of coins. A few more in it than before. The rich guy & the security guard are now yelling at each other, each stubborn, unafraid, no yield.

Explain any of that.

He keeps moving, knows any cop would bust him over those two in a snap. Most cops are OK but in a tense situation move bluntly & swiftly. Lock up the beggar soldier.

True?

All is holiness? I have no answer. Pretty words. Pretty, pretty. But I don't know.

The man stops & folds up his sign, stores his coins carefully tightly inside his boots, no jingle. He's gotten rolled a few times.

The downtown is loud with shoppers & musicians. No snow. He misses snow. He misses a lot.

Water. That's what. He knows a place, the bartender is kind. No free booze but he will pour you a glass of iced water any time. No judgment in his eyes either.

Shoulders his pack, adjusts his beat black knit hat, his Army jacket is warm enough, he's OK, eaten, just a warm hour or so & back to his business for rush hour.

The rich man's fury snaps when he looks back & sees the other has fled. Suddenly

empty, he stares at the guard talking on his radio & nods. Pulls out his silver-clipped wad, extracts a twenty, tucks it in the man's hand & departs.

Where to? Follow which one? Will they meet again? Are they important? I don't know. Everything is, I suppose.

Important, not holy? Both, neither?

A commercial interrupts *Trip Town* & the drinkers relax. "That show is crazy." "I like it sometimes." "Better than football?" "Hey now! Don't be a smart ass!"

cxxviii.

"You're doing well, young man. I've been following your progress."

"Thanks," says Dylan, finding himself back at Coffee Time Coffeehouse with the old & his crazy maps of centuries-long conspiracies.

"It's time for your report."

"Is this really where we are? Or are we back in those Woods? Or are we in my room where I live?"

The old man laughs, a clear, young laugh. His thick eyebrows dance through his even-longer tangled white hair.

"I was asking."

"Yes! A fine report! Go on!"

"There's a girl. Maya."

The old man sobers. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. I met her on the bus. Later we met John in those Woods."

"Where is she now?"

Dylan looks around, panic rides his face. "I—" He stands, stumbles.

"Sit."

"Is it the same night? Did I ever leave here?"

"Sit!" Dylan sits.

The man smiles at him. Not with warmth or humor. A little kindness. Maybe.

"Do you know what the word *maya* means?"

Dylan thinks. "Illusion."

The old man nods. "Yes. Also play. And dream. It's an elusive word but very provocative."

"She's not real?" Dylan whispers, slumping.

"None of any of this is real. All is continuous passage from one state to another. No form or being is permanent."

"Even God?"

"God is what some believe encompasses all. What bears all of this."

"Can I go now?"

"Back to Maya?"

Dylan nods.

"Dylan, don't be scared. You are not alone."

He wakes. Maya & John are standing over him, smiling & concerned. Here is his closet, his room, his friends.

He smiles too, uncertainly.

The old man retains his form awhile & bids me sit with him.

“You’re from an old memory.”

He nods.

“I was so lonely then, but very alert, chasing. I met you & we talked for a long time.”

Nods again.

“What did you have to say?”

“Do you accept that the world has no solution? That asking ‘Why?’ as you do leads on & on but no closer to arrival?”

“No. I accept that that I do not know why, maybe not even what would constitute a staying answer. But not that asking is ceaseless failure.”

He nods. “Go back. Resume.”

“Do I pass?”

“Pass what?”

“Why did you ask?”

He smiles with the kindness he withheld from Dylan. “Go. We’ll talk again.”

“Are you OK, Dylan?”

“I think so.”

“I was back first. Then John. We waited for you.”

“Thank you.”

“He fucked me til I cried on your bed.”

“What?”

“I said we agreed we need some breakfast. It’s nearly dawn.”

“OK.”

“My arms hurt from when he held me down & fucked my tight ass. I hoped my moans wouldn’t wake you.”

“What??” Dylan stands, shaky.

Maya smiles very pretty. “Dylan! I said I think our breakfast should include jelly doughnuts.”

John reaches forward & catches Dylan before he falls.

“Thanks” he whispers.

“She was so tight I had to ram it in to break her open. She liked it. She’s a dirty girl.”

Dylan stares at him.

“The bus, Dylan? Should we get the bus.”

He collapses.

cxxix.

Two words: it’s spreading, there were ideas brought to Global Wall he did not like.

Teach them. Mold them. Make them something good. Poison the sheep’s foul shallow perceptions with pretty packages of wise. Show them more.

Books shown him about magickal virgin juice, the possible conjures of invisible power. Make them into sorceress warriors & re-align the broken pact of men & nature. Fix it.

Build them, raise them, nurture them, teach them. Better than mute performing harems, psychedelic soul-crushing.

Better than empty revenge.

He agreed to little. Would not compromise on each being broken thoroughly.

What went on anyway? What was not shown Global Wall? How did she end up there in the first place before being hustled off?

Global Wall's personal assistant had engineered an entire secret world within the apparent one. His early goal had been to subvert Wall's mania, use it against itself, one day destroy Global Wall, not simply defeat him.

Early, I say, but not in the beginning. He had loved Global Wall until his heart cracked blackly & then had turned on him hard—

& then had tired of this too & decided no good could come from any of this continuing in any form—

Nearing time to burn down the White Woods.

Two words: it's spreading. For when his assistant realized this, that he could not turn this foul ship elsewhere, & rumor talked of other ships coming to join with Wall's, that was it. Burn the roots. Burn the soil. Burn the hours & any memories of them.

Two words: it's spreading. Time to stop it? A way? None had worked before. Wall was strong, & his lunacy drove him from deep within, from scorched loins & cracked heart.

But she had truly scared him. Scared him to sending her away. The others he had crushed. He did not crush this one? Could not.

Wall's assistant confided in no one the truths he knew, the lies he'd grown over the years, had written nothing down, kept parts away from parts. None knew there was a larger picture, much less saw it.

His words to Maya constituted the nearest he'd ever come to a confession of intent. It *was* confession.

Now he waited, ran Wall's flesh empire, orchestrated every move involved in breaking newcomers & readying them for their place in the order of things.

He did not flinch. His eyes did not yield least response to begging, to any plea.

Burn the White Woods down.

Burn them down.

Burn every root & leaf & branch down.

Burn. Burn. Burn.

Make sure Global Wall was well-chained & open-eyed to fate & its maker.

Words in Wall's assistant's head by day & night, spoke to nobody, no proof they existed, none.

White Woods will burn & explode & burn some more & nobody will come to help. That was part of the arrangement, reason to occasionally leave for meetings fraught with lies & thick envelopes of cash.

Burn. Burn. Burn.

CXXX.

My heart blows scarce at night & I am unsure. I look at Her & she shrugs.

"Tell me something."

"What's left?"

"What does that line mean?"

She stares. "You're smart enough."

"Tell me *something*!"

"It never ends til you fall & gone. Maybe not even then."

"Is that it?"

She nods. Looks sad for a moment.

"OK. That's something."

She smiles then. "You're doing OK. Enjoy."

"Thanks. Didn't we used to have a more . . . complex relationship?"

She nods.

"And?"

"And what? I'm still here. Wax & wane. You decide to want complex again, I'm ready. But this is good too."

"No preference?"

"No. Never have. It's on you."

"Always?"

"You seek me to help. You don't need as much right now. Maybe that's good. Maybe it's what happiness is for you."

"Maybe."

"But you're always trying to tease out the puzzle, the trouble, the warp in the tune."

"Warp?"

"The warp is where it gets interesting. Where there's uncertainty, & chance."

I nod. "The warp."

The warp in things, I let a few days mull on this, & when ready I stand, don my yellow hat & blue suit & look at Merry Muse, bowing—

"Not Rebecca? Not your other new wife?"

I shake my head, "old school," I say simply. She nods, this makes more sense than I have in awhile—

How long it's been since hand on her waist, my face leaning down toward hers looking away, & I try to follow this time, where does that look go? The day's its summer cheerful, the cafe patrons & their jolly gab, trees merry waving about, where does that look go? I follow—

"What's he doing on that show?"

"This is all about him, don't you know that?"

Hard laughter.

Rebecca catches Tom in her look. "They're wrong. It's as much about everyone else."

He nods. Nods again.

"Hartlee, tell me something from those old days. Remind me."

Blue eyes in a brilliant paranoid face, playing secret chords in high chasing nights.

"If you don't know any other way, it puts you in danger. But maybe that's the best thing for you."

Turn to the Psychedelic Viking Overlord, crazy hippy with his Magick Sword.

“Read from one of those secret books of yours.”

“Cosmic Early?” he cracks.

“Sure. Him.”

Hairy brute puts on his little schoolmarm spectacles & reads carefully.

“You think yourself lost or found, of some kind of path that you walk, perhaps climb. You press fist to chest & feel beat & breath & find metaphor there, deep metaphor to stroke & hue your world. You regard a round cheek in half-shadow, a lightly gesturing forearm & its accompanying rosiad voice. You admire in a man his great speech encompassing justice & the full moon & hidden purposes long suspected among generations. Or the other, mighty body leaping or crashing or hurling or lifting. Animals you admire as unknowable others, plants for their consumable qualities, medicinal aspects, aesthetic arrangements in wilds, woods, & gardens alike.”

He snorts. “More of this?”

I nod & he resumes. “More lint in the can, kindling to weak fires lighting & heating little. No answers in your vainly depicted God, no truth in your lustily drawn images of Beauty, hardly a clear, lasting note in the speech of your seers or the songs of your greatest troubadours.

“Little, the years pass, & then less. Again, hark, *little & then less*. A thousand hands & minds to the raising of great machines that merely hold out the cold & maintain the distance between man & man, man & nature. Little, less & less.

“Again, little, less & less. Faced with an event unexpected, name it, compare it, move it into its lingual & conceptual corral. Go on, feels good to suck the scare from the world.

“Explain life by the world miracle & death by the word mystery. Heave up on your grandest platform the mostly mythical heroes of your kind, best when dead, when tortured to death, when men of peace torn wildly, bloodily apart by bullet, by crucifix, by conspiracy. By common human need. By the least advocacy of either hard virtue or luring novelty.”

He looks at me again. I shake my head. “More later.” He packs up his sack of books, skewers spacetime to leave a star-shaped hole & departs with a wave & a laughing growl.

Warp in things. Could I do this better with a burning stick of oak & a cave wall? Why such modern thing as black ink pen? Or why not more modern, a blinking box & quickly tapping fingers, saving words with no inherent stain, nor understanding in the least what they are? Why not write in blood, fewer words, better ones because harder spent?

Tell me. & Tell me again.

Dancing still, she smirks at me. “You haven’t an idea how to do this anymore.”

“No. Maybe not.”

She whispers wetly in my ear, “Good, now you can get along somewhere.”

Warp in things, I saw to this idea in a psychedelic vision, how it is the accident, the sudden

anomaly, the odd blurt of words, the face with its very long nose, the lanky swing of bat, the guitarist who bends the flow somewhere else, & follows, & bids others follow, presuming nothing but there, look! & there! Over there!

cxxxi.

Slave to nothing, how sweet the words & empty to mull, slave to everything more tells it oh I'm hardly begun on this matter, I beg the night for these words when begging's hardly the way to it—

Yes, begging. Night, comfort me, I am alone & remorseful & far from anywhere home save these yawping pages.

Begging yes, & slave to everything & I admit tis so. Slave to the coin, slave to the music, slave to the way hands slide lips to thigh to cunt & demand she moan, & fucking beg for it, not trusting want in itself, need want's dirty dramas, beg me, beg hard, this universe has cut & I'm angry, beg for it, now! I want to give more, I want to do more, be more, believe more, love more, dance more, dream more, more & more, *beg for it*, that's how want is, needs the pretty bells & deep manacles, want is cage & key both, figure that one, *beg for it*, because I have, because I did, because I do, because I do less, because I only believe in Art I only believe in Art I only believe in Art I only believe in Art

I only believe in Art. *Beg for it.*

Good, slowly, close, yes, bite, lick, whisper, slave to everything. I watch & want & wish otherwise but nothing comes. Void waits but seeming impotent til its fine day come. Where the great strange creatures of the Universe? Talk to me, I'll listen. Come near, I heed.

Slave to everything. Slave to nothing. Slave to what? I ask again & again.

Beg a little more. You like it like that. Beg me.

Idea little beguile me.

Yes, be kind. Yes, life is mysterious.

Yes, all is connected. Yes, many

is one is all. Yes & yes.

Beg more. Beg harder.

They still kneel. Even tonight. Fall to knees in chanted unison & hold to the old teachings. Others plan every demise according to the old teachings. Pups smacked twice & fed steady the old teachings. Kings pound chests & smack preacherly of the old teachings.

Any new ones? Only guised up whores, old promises girdled to like young eagers. Hark! There is no sin! Hark! Be a lusty godful beast! Hark! We know now so much more than we did then & here look here & sign this & here & here, farthest star, yes, & tiniest speck, yes & physicists & mystics both yes & people from all walks of life—

Slave to nothing, say again.

Maya nude & riding John's hard cock, moaning wet, wanting more than this, has to be more

than this, even this spasm, very nice, I like it when he pushes me around a little, makes me want it, is this it? Takes me, claims me, it hurts, later it's nice. I like it slower, I like knowing what's happening, first time it went too fast. Now it's better.

Noisy Children ends its penultimate concert by exploding on stage. Char, shouts. Gone. Where they?

Now to the Ampitheatre with who's left. Enough of this laziness. Time to play with the naked drummers & the fullmoon bonfire.

I sit in some freak empty joint on very early Xmas morning 2005. Another man sips his coffee & stares drooling into the rain. I marry next weekend. Again. Married to Rebecca Americus in September 1999 or thereabouts.

"This adds."

"I know."

"You trust me?"

"Always."

"I am true."

"As am I."

"I only believe in Art."

"What else?"

"I don't know. People?"

"No. Believing in people isn't good. People change. Come & go. Die. Worse, just go. Change. Gone. You know."

"Yah."

"It's OK, Raymond."

"Slave to everything."

"Or nothing. No difference."

"Degree. Perspective."

"Then choose nothing. Decide & go."

"Like that?"

"Like that."

"OK."

"Go."

cxxxii.

Nothing between any of them truly. Seems. Maya remained vaguely housed deep heat in her loose pink. John had to turn his attention back to the shrooms, chasing their sorry fleeing asses.

We don't have asses.

Listen.

No, John. Goodbye for now.

No.

Just for now.
 Give me something more. *This is why I fucking drank!* No fucking answers. Too much fine ass. Too easy to put the one & other together.
 It's not for us to for you.
 I know. I'm not asking that. You little bastards know that.
 And you know we're not really little. Or even, really, a plural.
 Give me something. I love one I can't go near. I want to fuck the daylights out of the other. She knows it. I say nothing & she knows it.
 Being is knowing.
 Fuck you. Really. Are there little mushroom hippy chicks? Are there?
 What would Maya give to you? What does she have?
 She has *it*. The thing you have & lose. It doesn't come back. I've tried.
 So you'll take *it* from her? Will you keep *it*? Will *it* be gone? Will you then be quelled, satisfied?
 For a moment, yah. I know the look I'll put on her face. It will be fear, then wonder, then curiosity, then lust.
 Like that?
 Usually it's like that.
 Is Maya usual?
 No. None of this is.
 Then why are you trying so hard to make it so? Maybe there's something else here.
 I'm tired of something else. Too much, man! I want to get my rocks off with a fresh fine she-beast & go back to my cabin & sleep. Damn the rest.
 And Dylan? Damn him too?
 He's green. Not enough. A woman like that needs the long hard ride—
 You sound like a preening fool.
 Let me finish. The hard ride a man who's been through it a few times has to give.
It? Again.
 Yah.
 Same kind as Maya's *it*?
 No. The opposite.
 Ahh. So Dylan lacks her *it* & your *it* both? Does he have any *it*?
 Yah. A boy's. Not even an *it* yet. More an egg.
 An egg with an *it* inside?
Just let me fuck her. Take him somewhere. It will take awhile but not forever.
 Do you think you're her first?
 I don't know. I mean, I suppose.
 Are you sure?
 No. Has she?
 Has she what?
 Been with other guys?
 If you mean willing & entirely, it's doubtful.
 What then?
 That's for her to tell you or no.
 You're not going to help, are you?

Did you think we would?
 I don't know. Yah. I hoped. Some kind of loophole.
 Loophole?
 Yah. A loophole in the goddamned loneliness almost everyone feels almost all the time.
 We didn't conceive loneliness.
 Who did?
 The first time a man woke up, stood, moved along, reached a fork in his path, & it occurred to him he could choose either path, loneliness was conceived.
 Pretty. You little bastards.
 We'll meet soon again, John.
 Yah. Don't let the door in my mind hit you in the ass.
 We don't have asses, John.

lxxxiii.

It's been days & I want to tell you why: I now have two wives, married in both my worlds, maybe others too I don't know.
 A silver-colored ring & its blue infinity symbol, & I think about it to conclude whatever infinity it is packaged in this ever-passing moment—the bar at Luna T's raises a smashing toast—
 "Thanks."
 "What now? An orgy honeymoon?"
 "Some matrimonial lezzie loving?"
 "A harem! Whoohoo!"
 I stare within. "I'm grateful about it all."
 "Hear that? He's grateful."
 "I would be too"
 "What's your secret, Valentino?"
 "Keep your mind's teeth sharp & your heart's hands soft."
 "Keep yer—"
 "Mind's feet?"
 "Soft heart?"
 "Wha—?"
 I nod. The drinking roars on merrily celebrating . . . drinking. I disappear without explain.
 "I told him he shoulda run!"
 "He had his shot"
 "They never know til it's too late"
 "Ahh toast 'em. He deserves it."
 "Cheers to the beginning of the end!"

cxxiv.

Terror pursued by a lunatic named Grant, a shifting being of evil, this upon my return

home, stolen coat on one bus, stolen bike on another, & he's carved & awled & written long mad messages in my door, hurtles down the stairs to consume me & I wake yelling—

"Ahh, Grant."

"Who is he?"

"Your enemy"

"Why?"

"He was due"

"So now he's arrived, tis all?"

"His name is Odin Grant."

"I don't remember the Odin part"

"He will hunt you until one of you dies. Worse, capitulates."

"Does this story need an archenemy?"

"He does not reason. He consumes with ceaselessness & fury."

"Who are you?"

A magick psychedelic Viking sword waves about the air.

"Grant?"

"Odin Grant."

He nods. I do too.

"Do I chase him in dreams or waking fixtion?"

"He is in all places & reality."

"Do I engage him or avoid him?"

"Neither avoid nor seek him."

"Will this take over this book?"

"If you allow or deny him too far."

A Viking sword swings around him & he's gone—

CXXXV.

I dance with her because this is wedding & she is muse & whatever else this truth tough enough to stand solid or great floating in the aether, I do not question it, I question the world, I dance with her

"What have you learned?"

Desire never stops blowing until everything else gone, I don't know if even then.

"What is desire?"

An arcing that for a passage seems unending, no fall, no down, little, & less. But there is rise & fall, both—

"What is desire?"

A scratching at the babbling universe until it speaks one's secret tongue. A suck on the strange for that heaviest sugar.

"What is desire?"

Disappointment. Over & over.

"What is desire?"

The night's repeating game, its deep promise & slow release.

"What is desire?"

Nothing. Everything.

“What is desire?”

Dylan looks at Maya as she salts her omlette. Follows her fingers as they lift & fall. John watches her in the restaurant window’s reflection & also two spatting alley cats outside. Heat, desire, never ends, every fucking where.

“What is desire?”

I don’t know.

“What is desire?”

Memories. I remember Boston mostly of my years. Who & how I was & changed over time. I think of Portland too, my ragged several months there. I don’t think of Connecticut very often.

“What is desire?”

I look at Merry Muse, blue eyes beneath her pink bonnet. Something trembles, in or about me, I’m not sure.

cxxxvi.

A voice quiet raises by slow steps. “I ponder my deepest & conclude that a black iced pond in shadowed woods is best answer to any soul’s query on truth, God, the hereafter, the anywhere.

“I ponder, I wish to know. Or perhaps I do not. Perhaps I simply wish my heart’s fears denied & its hopes proven my truth is all truth.

“I ponder & I do not know. Studying this pond I notice its frozen ripples, water shaking with cries for freedom til frozen, til that moment when the air stilled its shuddering yearn.

“I ponder & nothing occurs. All happens & no answers. The trees are frozen too. What few creatures exposed & hurried.

“No enemy am I to anything here, no threat. Little, & less.

“I have nothing in this image but my heart’s long years of unanswered want displayed. No empathy, not even an enemy left.

“Something moves among the trunks, & I go. I go.”

cxxxvii.

Tonight return to see an old friend & find us both different, how, maybe just me, how?

I was here years ago, some, & loved it, thought: new, along, go, I was greedy for this new place’s every exotic juice—

I looked up & around & saw power & wanted my part in it—

I’m not who I was there, that here now less & less resembles—

Ended up in a smoky diner & no answer to anything—

What beyond my senses? Others. The world. I’ve been there, then, nowhere, non-then—

What missing? What present?

“Hey look! It’s that show!”

“Which one? There’s about a million boxes on the screen. It’s like a hive!”

Global Wall descends into pink, a cry, a weep, his two or three words, then a growl, a moan. Breathe for me. Good. Deeper. Good. You'll like it. I promise. You always have. I know.

Maya looks at John & Dylan, she decides it's time for her to do this, they are too webbed inside her want, what does she want, something quiet & soft right now, awhile, later more, later her teeth will grow long again, she knows, she's always known—

"Where does this go, David?"

"Where do you want it to go?"

"Simple. Clean. Acoustic."

"This story?" Laughs.

"Why not?"

"Your soul crawls for mazes & self-flight & arching backs. Acoustic is to clean your mind for the next. You know that."

cxxxviii.

I ask Dylan's old man, because I believe noone anymore, tell me desire is virtue.

Desire is by-product, as you understand it.

Of?

You do not know desire. You know deprivation. A hole you try to stop, yet you do not, you enter the hole, become the hole, forget there was anything else.

Am I alone?

You hardly constitute individual enough to adjudge. A few light scratches on the wall.

And you?

I don't exist at all. You know that.

You're one of my scratches?

In a way.

What do I do? How do I scratch deeper?

He looks at me, all hard eyes, so much the stranger I don't know anything.

What do I do?

Further out, deeper in? Is that your speculation?

Is that wrong?

I don't have your answer.

The night is long. I have no answers for it. Nothing comforts. There's music, perhaps that.

What then.

The night is long. Shadows, glares, light crawling. I sit another desolate joint. ZombieTown, a new guise. heh.

Grant appears in the facing armchair.

"I'm not your friend. I oppose you."

Shadow?

"Worse."

Global Wall grows restless & orders one plucked. Taps the camera. "That one."

"She's not prepared."

"That one. Now."

His man assembles a team. His whims used to come more often.

From the restaurant she follows with her friends to the near university. Dorm snatches can but clean but tricky. Lots of eyes around.

He prepares the bedroom himself. The wardrobe is black & red he does not bother with subtlety. He watched her on the hidden camera & decided.

He's ordered her delivered by dawn. Then decides they have three hours. Awake. Aware. No drugs. Few.

He chooses carefully, more so than years, each scent. Shampoo, perfume for neck & tummy, vaginal oil.

A fire drill. Fake. Fire trucks. Cruisers. Tricky. He watches closely. Wants her fresh & whole. All involved are warned: no sampling. Not a stroke, not a lick, not a word.

His man says nothing. Gives the orders.

The night before he'd spoke to a group of progressive businessmen. Told them they fought on the wrong fronts. There is no morality in consumer society. What sells, rules. Beatles, Britney. LSD, cocaine.

"Reactionary politics relies upon a mass brainwashing. A willingness to forget & remember & reshape moment by moment, hour by hour, & do it knowingly & unknowingly. Nothing solid but survival.

"The day your morning paper does not arrive on time, the toilet does not flush, an elected leader says war is for profit, blood bleeds coin, revolution will be here.

"Don't hold your breath for it"

Asked what to do, "There's no answer but to solidify your hold in the mud & don't think about it, too much, like everyone else."

Asked again, "Set fire to all your own, & set your neighbor's fire, & kill him if you must, if he won't set fire his neighbor's."

Asked again, "Good night."

She lies in the van, scared, half-awake, terrified, fully awake, yelling, quiet.

They had handled her firmly but there was no want. Nobody had touched her, not as much as a typical hour in a bar. No looks, no words.

The fire alarm had been strange. When was the last? They had to go out the rear doors. She was with her floormates, the ones she'd been out with earlier, then they were gone, she wasn't standing with them, then she wasn't standing with anyone, then she was in this van.

In between? Hands, pressing but no grope. Creepy.

A trick? A frat prank?

He presses several buttons & mirrors all over the room. Angled, warped, clouded, clear, colored, shifting.

Tell me desire has good ends. Breeding? Perpetuation? Nothing. Desire contains its beauty within. Its effects are unpredictable, often bad. Call it culture, call it law, call it religion. Call it Art? I don't know.

Later there is little residue. A light bite mark on her upper thigh. A sore ankle from how much she danced for him. A tiny hole in the pink thong she'd had on. He'd explained a little between each go.

She knew what it was like, she'd been gotten drunk & fucked. A couple of times. The risk of parties. The risk of wanting to say yes sober & not being able to. You take that drink, you ignore the extra druggy tang.

But he watched her, watched deep into her eyes, watched them open wide, dim, flutter with his thrusts. Nobody had ever watched her face like then. By the third time she was watching him back. Wishing she hadn't wasted time running. Why run? Who taught her that?

Besides, if he had the power to snatch her from her dorm bed, what couldn't he do? And why her? Punishment? Compliment?

"Your thighs." That's what he said. All those hours & two words. She remembered this.

Is this desire?
No.
Love? Coupling?
Little of either.
What do you believe in?
The power to affect.
Is that your angle?
This time.
Is there more?
There isn't any.
Nothing for all that?
No.

The mirror above them undulated like liquid, she couldn't focus, he wouldn't let her lay still & take it. She'd learned how to do that sometimes. Sometimes it went faster. After he'd cornered her, he'd dressed her in red & black & applied all sorts of creams & ointments to her body. Carefully.

This is owned. This is possessed. Not frat boys & locked cars. Not boys in class & three remembered clever ideas. This is *I am his*.

She watched her legs wrap around him, watched her mouth open & cry, howl, beg, learned

that her voice could speed or slow him, her fingernails could direct him, her hips were stronger than she knew, her cunt a powerful entity, her drove, she drove harder, he breathed, she ate his breath, he moaned, she made it ugly song, then turned it into burning wings, then exploding seeds of starlight—she learned better what she was—*what we are*—

cxxxix.

Where the elusive free realm, the shift past cage & open plain, in & through dream, or down into molecules, down deep & hard & true I ask & again, what path unwalked still? What belongs to this animate flesh, come & gone with it, simply the activities of passing beat & breath, memories without a chance of lasting bite, what then?

Solace in any plan revealed, in the raised gesture of any calm eyes, come on, what explains? What cures? What sweetens past some odd hour?

I don't know. Perhaps the godmongers right, one some or many stripes of them. Or the sufferers to break the wheel. Or the lovers of sin for how it simplifies the human tasks into obey, transgress, repent, breed, age, die.

Pick your own steps.

I notice a staircase at Luna T's & a mezzanine led to, & it's all fairly hidden in a place above the barroom & bandroom—don't know how really—

She wonders if she's his woman now but he has become quiet not tender. So she wonders when the van will dump her somewhere, home or near it if lucky.

"I won't tell if you talk to me."

Silence.

"I . . . I liked it. You told them not to touch me. You dressed me special."

Silence.

"Let me stay. Please."

"No."

"Why not? You brought me, Am I supposed to fall down dead because you fucked me rough?"

"That's why."

"Should I be crying? You don't know girls very well. We take what we can get with what we have."

"That too."

"So you'd keep me if I was ready to shoot myself? If I was scared & huddled over in sadness & shame? You *fucked* me. You were good. But it's only so much."

"You won't remember much. The milk"

"You drugged my milk. But I didn't drink much. Would you like me to drink the rest? It's warm & probably sour but I will."

He hurts her then. Not badly, but enough. Doesn't drug her for the return she's done.

"Feel it against your thigh, so hard. How many thighs it's pressed & taken. You another. The next one asleep right now in her Rock Star pink Teddy & black thong. Feel it want to hurt you. Feel it take you & depart. Feel it forget you. You'll feel it when it's gone, when I cloud your memory to rubble, when you wake in your bed & hardly know. Where were you tonight? You wandered off, half-asleep, got lost. I will stay in your dreams though where real power is

native.”

Says no more. Cuffs her to the bed, it hurts, she cries, he won't stop awhile. The drugs begin to work eventually. The pain drowns, & deep want.

cxl.

Nearing dawn, Maya had led Dylan & John back to CoffeeTime. She knows about the old man, more than Dylan. He's not to be feared for one thing, at least how Dylan does. He described the old man to her & she knew who he was. They were friends of a sort. He helped her out. Maybe again, it's been a couple of years.

I look at Grant. “Are you worth any lines or thoughts?”

“No. I don't care for your Art. So-called Art. Whatever it is. Not much.”

I nod. “Not all do.”

“Not like me. I'm worse. I don't like it from within.”

I nod. “I probably need you.”

“No, you don't.” She steps between us. Her hair more than red. Her hair fire.

She won't leave. She screams & kicks.

She isn't done. This is getting messy.

She fights to groggy consciousness.

He tells his man to bring her to the Old residence. A particular girl.

Merry Muse sets a ring of pink & red around Luna T's mezzanine. “He can't come there.”

“Why don't you like him?”

“Your stories will be about your war with him, not your dance with me.”

“You're jealous?”

“You're not up to this shift.”

“Why not?”

She says nothing.

“Is he a muse too?”

“No.”

“What?”

“A demon of sorts. He chases you, you don't chase him.”

“Trust you?”

“Yes. But I don't know you will. You will hook onto anything that sucks your ink to paper.”

“My only morality. What fills pages is good.”

“And who. Your why, your how.”

“Will he?”

“You will with or without him.”

He calls from below, “have a drink with the boys, Ray!” Voices cheering follow.

cxli.

Another voice speaks up & the rest quiet some. "Some call this moment our greatest peak of development, how our hands shape with higher power than ever known, how our hearts shift tangled among one another deeper. How close we are to . . . something.

"Others hark back, turn long locks & a raw sack of memories to an earlier hour's subtleties."

"Jesus H. Christ, this again."

"A few look further back, call this puzzling life a shard from some bigger entity. No progress to arrive here when once men like us had been so much farther!"

Someone tosses a gin-soaked wedge of lime at the television.

"I don't say there are answers true & false, full & partial. I too am seeking among the hard, untelling shadows & the bleak, shimmering hues. I too am feeling the ever more gaunt repetitions of life while not knowing if something else explains this, reveals bloody hand as dearest flight.

"So what to do, how to abide this bedeviling consciousness, this daily raise & nightly fall?"

"Punt, Mac."

"Some would say give it up a little, just a gesture, a wave close & away, nobody will notice, a ruffle of surrender, just a flicker."

The restlessness in the bar gets loud. Mr. Bob the barman leans up to cut the broadcast.

"Stay that hand! Think ye this a passive broadcast, another in a series of anothers?"

A bottle hits the TV's on/off knob & it goes off. It doesn't break when it hits the rubber matt behind the bar. The cheer is muted; Mr. Bob's been known to clear the bar for lesser transgressions. He simply nods, grim-faced. OK. Barely

xccli.

Take a breath, & continue, deeper in, it's a trail, it's a dream, life a fancy, are gloom & rut strong enough to deny?

A breath, it's a labyrinth, always was, so what then? Toward what any, this book, this life?

I wonder. A few days pass, & where the way in here, a forward, a back?

Begin smaller. The glaring lamp, the green bedspread, the beloved tending my small ailments as I tend hers—

OK, a breath, & go—

"What a *sorryass, lying, sack of shit* with *sugar on top!*"

"Hey, that's our President! Watch your mouth!"

"Your president, not mine! I don't hail court-appointed oil scum bastards!"

"Yah? Who else is there to defend our flag? You gonna sit down & chat with Osama in the train car?"

"I don't know there if *is* an Osama, or ever *was* an Osama or if he is who he says he is? How do we know?"

"You're a lunatic! Hey, barkeep, this man's had too much! Shut him off."

"I've had less than you. Seeing that talking chimp on TV took the thirst right out of my belly."

"Are you calling him a liar?"

"They're *all* liars! Wake up! They don't care about you or me or our families or our health or *jack* about us!"

Pause.

"Yah. They're reaming my ma of her pills."

"You're agreeing now?"

"He ain't perfect."

"He's barely upright."

cxliii.

"Some talk of the über-culture whence sprang all the great ancient civilizations. Greece. Egypt. Others talk of the silver spaceships arriving among our furred, hoot ancestors, & a touch, perhaps a coupling accelerates humanity millennia, all from one or a few good fucks."

Pause.

"Still others point to our stranger plant friends, the rootless mushrooms, & contend that when enough proto-humans had eaten them, found union with them, their blown-out, remade neurons altered our race's meager course.

"Ahh. Mmm. The scriptures of Jews & Christians themselves are blazing with magick, with mystical event. The Garden of Eden & its Tree of Knowledge. The young virgin Jewess who births Godd in flesh, who is, unbroken, seeded, & mothers."

Pause. A deep, hard, hurting cough.

"Some would in modern times attribute to splitting atoms or mapping the human genome a sense of cracking the final code. A following through on breaking Eden's rules about forbidden knowledge. Others would say good Dr. Hofmann found Eden's secrets in a peculiar molecule, a brain implosion, a true, lasting mindfuck. Ah."

What pleases most is how one color contrasts or highlights another, crossing lines, cotton across skin, what is tight, what is smooth, what breathes narrowly & waits, what struggles by its fate, give it a set of wings & a piercing buzz—

So, explain. Again, come on. This hour, the next. Some hour. Any? Can you?

By slant. Not even then.

"We live unknowing most of what there is to know. Living a stretch of years hardly a particle, limited to one planet, often one language, one continent, a few cities? Led, instructed, told, judged, habited, the experience of one race, one gender, five senses at best, for most, what hour would any of us be able to explain?"

She adapts to the habit of these days, it's not hard. He likes to take pictures of her, she likes the attention. When he buys her costumes she wears the ones she likes, no pressure. She notices they get skimpier, & accepts this. These hours belong to her, she chooses how they play. *It feels good.*

Go on, imagine it, which do you think? The mushrooms, the space aliens? Atlantis? Mu? Some nutty mix of them? What to believe of ancient origins?

I hardly believe in this reality at all. I can't say wherefrom or whereto. I've seen elsewhere & then returned. I deny dreams mean less than waking, yet it seems each of us dreams alone & wake together, though that does not mount to great much.

His fingers insist, softly, not a shaky boy's trying not to laugh or run. His fingers are smooth, they know, their knowledge is bewitching, she lets them move freely. She could say no, but doesn't. Say what, say anything? He wants this, & she thrills to the heat in the room, to something real.

Does it matter, aliens or shrooms or what? Is it important when none can say for sure & a lifetime chasing chimeras?

What then? I can't tell you. I simply don't know. I sit here in a mannish structure full of similar creatures I can't ever really—& I don't know.

cxliv.

Noisy Children returned, within Luna T's Cafe, but deep within, deeper within than ever, more than Ampitheatre, Rebecca had said there was more, farther, whatever word for egg within the yoke within the egg—

nonetheless, returned, & all glad, they'd done a lot of staining the world, strumming & beating out the virus from here & now around, is how it works, truth accretes if one can call it truth, or maybe truth among truths, or truths among truth, or a complex fugue of both & neither—

eh—

Noisy Children are back & tis known well though they are full at their work now & not a minute for sitting at the bar roaring with the rest—

But those at the bar are glad—Professor Tom & his boys raise mug after mug of brew in their honor—

“Jimmy Reality!”

“Say, guys”

“Over here! Join us! Barkeep, where is this man's well-crafted martini!”

“I'm looking for Rich. I hear he's back around.”

“Yah, back there. Way back there.” The Professor winks merry & bleary, high on the book of Greek myths he'd read them all earlier. Sisyphus. That boulder up & down the hill, over & over. What arguments it had caused!

“I woulda stopped!”

“He can't! It's his fate. The gods are punishing his arrogance.”

"Balls! Death ain't like that!"

Jimmy looks at Mr. Bob the barman, a bottle of Beefeater gin in his hand, ready to mix at a nod. "The Ampitheatre?" He says, reluctantly. Mr. Bob says, "No. Keep going."

"Where?"

"That's all I know. Rebecca told me that. Sorry I don't know more."

"OK. One drink. Then I go." A cheer.

cxlv.

May knowing what to come will be hard & wishing for a soothe to help her

I have to go back there

I know, child

They don't. John . . . and Dylan.

Nor should they. Your decision. Your chosen path from this place. You can't leave with them.

She looks at John, he is distracted by the music so some relief from the hot lorn need of his look, wonders if he could have been her friend & doubts it. This man doesn't mix sex with friendship.

She looks at Dylan, he seems distracted by something invisible in the air, a novelty only to him.

Her heart twists. Her thighs tighten. He possesses the hand she will need, the desire she will wish to sate. Like a boy he thinks in strange, contradictory terms. Woo her. Flowers. Candy. He hears pop songs as instructions.

Really? Dylan? Hm. Other boys surely. What then with him? Why does he delay? They held hands before, now here at his favorite place, he sits in an armchair nowhere near hers.

She catches herself. What's all this? She doesn't know. She's never had a boyfriend, of her own choosing, & it confuses her some.

Patience. When you have to go, you will.

But why me? I don't understand.

Nothing makes sense, child. Nothing. High bureaucratic technocracy from sludge in a few millennia?

I don't know.

He will have a choice too. Both of them will. They may come after you & prove unlucky.

No. No! I have to do this on my own. You can't let them come after me. You can't.

Their choosing. Each his own.

You *can't*.

Each loves you after his own heart. Together they are a potent & unwieldy foe.

He will hurt them. If I go back, it's my doing. Me.

"Maya? Are you OK? Look at me. Open your eyes. It's John & Dylan, see? Your friends?"

John is smiling at her, warmth high, want lower. Dylan is smiling too, odd for him & his strange street puppy soul.

"John told me you were OK but we need to stick with some of you, see how it went,"

Dylan's words become nonsense & he falls away with the rest of Coffee Time—

Where now? She looks around & sees nothing for her to grab onto. She thinks she's still sitting.

I am sitting. I choose that I am sitting right now.

Slowly, child.

Where did I go?

You got too upset & fell back. You're trying much here.

Can I be back with them?

You never left.

She opens her eyes. John & Dylan are still nearby but both are distracted as before.

OK. I get it now.

Nothing ill will befall them here & now. The rest is beyond the purview of easy estimation.

Tell me more. You helped me once.

I hid you from those with no claim to you.

You saved me.

No, child. Their mission was saving you, likely by marking you third child bride to the left & corralling you accordingly. I let you avoid the chute to all that. Yet you have found other tangles since.

I'm trying.

Indeed. You would be far worse off if you weren't.

Why can't they be my family?

Learning what that is, family, one of your extended lessons.

What does he want with me? There were others. Lots of them.

He doesn't want with you. He had you removed. Tis his assistant who made you the offer you trouble about.

So what do I do?

You've decided. You'll go.

But Dylan & John?

The old man snorts at her, or something, & says no more.

cxlvi.

Trip Town sites show up on the Internet. Not for everyone, of course, there are tricks & keys to it. One page along the path might open every other time for awhile, then one in twenty times, then freeze & crash your computer, especially if it's not Mac or Linux. But regardless of brand, some made it through, some didn't, few most times, almost none every time. You could bookmark every link, even write down the path, & it would change. There was no logic to it. Some found eating several tabs of liquid Lucy helped; others tried sobriety.

Often you got through & dumped in a chat room, often that was that. You & another or six or 20 or a hundred others. Sometimes you could type comments, sometimes not. Sometimes the chat was in Norwegian or Swahili or Esperanto or Bump. Sometimes it was full of horny girls who wanted cybersex badly, giggled, wouldn't tell you their ages as they fed you a fractured stream of nude images—sometimes it seemed like the room was full of narcs & they were telling you how quickly their spy equipment could find your exact location, name

address—

Sometimes the chat could be broken open with the right typed word, it would squeak loudly & fall apart in two pieces or a hundred, & there you were somewhere else, perhaps now watching a new episode, or an old one with a new ending, or the one with you in it, or the one with the first girl you ever loved, or boy, maybe it was hardcore porn, maybe you fucking him or her or them, or them fucking you, maybe you made her beg & crawl, maybe you watched as a green creature tied her up & flayed her wildly while assfucking her with both his cocks or a rusty flashlight or a candy cane thin & impossibly long—

Maybe the chat cracked open & you were in a text forum, a series of them, a hundred, every topic more interesting than the next

	Posts	Views
TripTown & LSD	111	5000
TripTown & Schoolgirl Secrets	3000	40,0006
TripTown & the Planet Overlords	12	6,66,71
TripTown & God's Imminence	A	ZZ☹
TripTown & the Numina	☹	6969696969
TripTown & the Eschcaton	π	?
☹ TripTown & 2012	40189	
TripTown & AmeriKKKan Empire	!!	
TripTown & the Vatican's 10,000		
Year Reign of Glory	†	†
TripTown 25,000 AD	∞	

Which to click? Someone had said if you clicked the wrong one the site crashed badly like you wouldn't be allowed back for a month. What the fuck?

So you don't know what to do & watch as the site degrades into random dots & reassembles after several slow hours into your name, even working in the nickname you had as a very young child & this is too fucking much, your mom called you that & SHE'S FUCKING DEAD!

Too much til music comes on & maybe it soothes, the guitars are sweet & they make your eyes go pretty in the dark of your room, did you eat tabs this time, or no? Hard to remember. Is it the same night? What is it? Why?

The music seeps out in colors & fur & moves you to your bed with obscure urgings & you have no fucking clue but a vow, a slow vow, to be back—

cxlvii.

The one thing Ali Doyle & his son Menace have in common is *TripTown*. They used to be close but lately Menace isn't around much. Ali doesn't ask him where, Menace doesn't say.

But *TripTown* unites them as ever. They watch it together, Ali with his quart of Schaeffer, glass mug emblazoned Boston Red Sox 1975 American League Champions, & his shake of salt shaped & colored to look like smiling white-bearded old Papa Smurf; Menace & his pipe,

sometimes hash, sometimes flavored tobacco. Sit together & watch in warm silence.

Sometimes Menace comes out of his more rarely slept-in bedroom later in the night & guides his Papa to his room & they read the website Red Dog Conspiracy together. Ali ran a newsstand for many years, counted out change by hand, his receipts paper, his mail delivered by Jack Shite the postman. Jack's stepdaughter Moonlight when her father was unwell. Perhaps a tippler, perhaps not. So computers to Ali are for *Star Trek* & *2001*.

Still, he watches, he sucks at these rare hours with Menace. He is growing thinner, shrunken, while his boy is hulking out.

Menace takes no chances. He bookmarks every path, every clue, keeps records on his puter & on CD backup copies. Sometimes he panics & starts emailing his many scattered accounts information in various file formats. He knows some will disappear, some will change. Not all.

Menace is obsessed. He knows Maya on the show, or thinks he does. He's not sure but more often lately clues persuade him.

He doesn't think he loves her but he can see where it's headed & he feels he is more than an anonymous viewer. He has to get there, the White Woods. He had to help her.

Menace has a girlfriend & a boyfriend. He never sees them together nor tells each of the other. Each adores him, each imagines his long silences somehow sum to a return of feeling. Each loves the feel of Menace's large angled cock in his/her ass. Menace will occasionally reward each with giving him a blow job, sometimes in the course of one night. In this way he connects them. She goes down on his damp cock & imagines he was jacking off earlier thinking of her. Menace inspires in neither jealousy nor insecurity.

Ali sits at the bar with Tom & the boys, usually quiet, thinking. He favors Mr. Bob the barman who pours his drink & lets him be but for the kind, inquiring word.

"I wish he opened up to me like he used to."

"I remember he would come to pick you up here. Nice boy. Has he got a night job now?"

"No. He doesn't talk much. He has a lover, or two. A dozen, for all I know."

"You still watch the show."

Ali smiles, a wondrous flicker of gladness.

"Never miss it. Then he gets me to show me more on his computer. He's amazing with that thing."

"He sounds OK then. They grow up, Ali. He still loves you."

Ali nods. A long talk for him.

cxlviii.

Maya on the couch, Dylan in one armchair, John in the other. An old man sitting next to Maya, wavers like a weak radio signal.

Tell me something I can use.

The advice is always the same. Beware & be aware. Sing true. Avoid authorities. Nearer nature.

What else, child?

Why all this? Where is it from? Why want? Why do they want me?

What do you want?

I was happy at the ocean, it was big, it's always there in me, always close, I hear it now, I feel it now when I let myself, when I slow, stop.

The want is life. This life. This way, this level, this manifestation, this time, do you understand me?

You've told me all this before. Over & over. It doesn't help me with my decisions.

You've decided already. You're going to him.

Menace is recording this exchange when suddenly it ceases. Quickly he tries to replay it. Nothing.

"Fuck!" he yells.

Ali peaks in. "Now, Menace, with that tongue of yours."

"I had something."

"It's a show, son. A strange, strange show. But it's on the TV, we watch it & it comes & goes."

"No. I thought so too. Then I didn't. Then I really didn't."

"I know you're sweet on the girl. But she's an actress portraying a role."

"Then where are the credits? I've never found a single credit for anything in this show"

"It don't matter. Just creating more mystery, is all. Acting, son, really good acting. Know the difference."

"Pops, she's real. I know it. They're all real. It's not a show. What's happening with them, is really happening. The White Woods. Global Wall. Luna T's Cafe"

"Hey, that's my bar!"

"It's all the same. All the same fabric. Real as us. Real as us, Pops."

Ali sits with Mr. Bob again. "Is he right? Tell me honestly."

Mr. Bob wipes the counter absently.

"I could say but I think you know. Menace isn't a fool. Or a liar."

"So . . . that show . . . it's real?"

"I don't know really. But I've met Dylan. His story has passed through here. He's a nice young man. Lost, like you see him on TV."

I want to help you, Maya.

You want to fuck her, Menace.

I want to help you & fuck you, Maya.

Get in line, Menace.

cxlix.

Maya retreats & I follow, only me, I follow her where nobody else can, I follow her back pink note by pink note, slow upon each one

You'll expect all from me.

I always do. It's how my muses work.

I'm your muse now?

You're Dylan's. Mine in a sense.

How to be yours fully?
 That's no longer possible. Some paths close with the years.
 I don't believe that. Do you really?
 I don't believe in anything anymore & if I did it would not be in people. If I believed
 in anything it would be something people hardly know runs them, runs their sorry world.
 Want? Desire?
 Get on your knees.
 No. Stop.
 Then leave. There's no mystery. Nothing. Nothing to know but DOB & DOE.
 Date of birth & date of expiration. Are you kidding me?
 I look at Maya & truly wish I could hurt her. But I can't. I don't. I wouldn't if I could.
 That's for gone years.
 And for this one? The next?
 I don't know. I wish I did. I really do.
 I would fuck you if I could.
 I know.
 But you're going to whore me into this story again. To one & the next?
 You'll like it. I'll make sure.
 Gee thanks. Why don't you want me?
 I don't want anything.
 You're *all want!*
 Yes! But I do not wish to be.
 It's a long way still.
 I know.
 What then?
 Walk the path, sing true. There isn't anything else. Now go back there.
 No.
 Yes. I said so.

cl.

Has this book summed to anything in its thickening bloom? Moments, like everything else. Moments. Most amounts to little & less, & I know it & try to care despite.

A moment, a slow moment. Shadows of moving creatures, the smell of blood & flesh & movement, bones, I have it to raise it higher, not enough, not enough, ever, not high enough, not high enough, leap & not high enough, move slowly & close, not high enough, slip one between two & three sighs around, not high enough, I slink, I cry, not high enough ever,

Slow, & then slower. A hand floats & gestures, the chords hit harder, the elixir is strong as the world

Slow & even slower, the feel of leather on denim, the near of the strange & how to breach it, how to cut two & three, the Viking's magick Psychedelic sword for daily use, any of it?

Little changes, if any. Still the hustle for coin & tit. Still the godmongers & the fat kings & preachers ringed round with diamonds, blood, & bones

Nothing changes I'm wondering if ever. Ever the hustle for coin & tit? Tell me other, tell me true.

What to breach but a fresh dollar & an uncut cunt?

Tell me something. I will write about it years if you tell me something new.

I look at the old man. Know something I don't? He shakes his head. It doesn't matter, you'll fight longer at rest than most in their fury. Fine, & fuck you.

I come to sit in this armchair, Coffee Time Coffeehouse, Portland, Oregon, whatever shit piece of truth I have runs straight through here & know it—find it, sometimes I'm not fond of it, hurts too much—*sing true, fucker*—

cli.

Noisy Children deeper than the Ampitheatre what might it be here's one go: I'd eaten 30 hits of acid, maybe more, & writhed in my tent in the Everglades & without 100,000 saw in the new century crying happy to the groove but I did not cry happy I was not I how it fell away that night

& forward to a night I watched a bearded scarecrow at his blinking box, its cascades of numbers & lights & his fingers tapping numbers & symbols I imagined man-machine symbiosis til there is no between the flow runs both ways ahh

& skip back to a pond of water & a pretty girl & all those lost hours still tremble in me, her ragged pretty voice, my perpetual dirty carcass,
I raged for beauty for freedom the same—

clii.

The resistance is everywhere, always. The revolution is now.
Not tomorrow. Now.
Revolution now.

Another one: it was only 9 or 10 months but it stretched oh far, & I called the setting ZombieTown, the test now to extract what remains that is mine, what is not a fool vast of fragments, & I know at least one. It was nights when I roamed the town. My steps took me to a lowdown joint, & there some or most of the night, with my books & walkman, my notebooks where I've lived most of the best of my years—

Stop. What of this. The psychedelic dream is in part a praise for each & all, what is common the truest matter at hand, only, chase this—

Breach time & space, cross skin to skin, feel it like it's happening now, tis, to me, you, every, the differences less & less, the differences words the differences none—

What then? A bus rolls down Pine Street as I sit watching now but toss a rope to that hour I sat watching from another table, & then to what else? To the future? What unrarried place? I fear illness & poverty & loneliness, the sink by hours from here to hereon, if hereon there even be—

& the world after me? a lined hook tossed arcing over my life to the world before me? Caught & tossed back to tonight a swamp, nameless, I don't know where, & tossed where? Through a dreaming tribesman who sees & knows me, can we speak?

“Hello.”

“ello.”

“I am Raymond.”

“Ngai.”

“I'm in your dream. I've been weaving out, one place & year to the next.”

“What can you tell me about the secrets of the world?”

“Secrets?”

“You are a god in disguise. I am not fooled.”

“No.”

“How may I become rich?”

“I don't know. I'm not rich.”

“The gods don't need money!”

Hooked line tossed up & catches a cloud, holds, holds. Nighttime. I can't see the ground very well. Wind pushes along. No lights below. What year, which century? Letting go, easier to it, whatever kind of here this is. OK. I let more go, become a small cluster of skinless bones & eyes—a paper seagull of staring brightly into the hard, steady breeze—

Revolution, everywhere, always. No hour chaff by nature, no soul fallen & gone without import—

Menace brings his friend Fruity Toot Toot home to hack the Red Dog Conspiracy site—Fruity is gay but knows Menace is all about that skinny white chick Maya now so he's cool, & besides Menace listens to his lengthy stories about his greenhouse, his marijuana plants, his ayahuasca, his cacti, his shrooms, & so on, FTT grows a large glass building full of psychotropic plants—hacking is a sideline, something to smoke his DMT & do—or some *Salvia Divinorum*—whatever—hack-n-puff—he hasn't even had a boy in months—

“What are you looking for?”

“I want to find her”

“Maya?”

“Yah. I have to stop her.”

“Listen, kid, how many are doing that? Come on. Even I can see she's hot with that pink blonde candy cane hair & hippy raver chick vibe. That is one horndog show.”

"It's not a show. It's real."

"I know. It's one of those shows where real people play out some kind of game."

"No. It's more. It's our world. I don't know how to explain it."

"Your old man asked me if you're OK. It was the first time he talked to me. Just now. When I came out of the toilet. You worry him. He's OK."

"Yah, I've shown him all this. He doesn't believe it."

"Look, there, see that? The letter j. It's a clue. A font clue. I bet if we triple-click on it, we'll find out it's a secret link."

The forums on the monitor's screen disappear. The screen is black.

"What did you do?"

"Relax, Homes."

The screen begins to bubble, liquefy, distort more & more.

"Tripilicious!"

"What do we do?"

"We take a hit each of this Sally 10x & go in."

"Into *Trip Town*?"

"Right down its black throat like a couple of great big ding dongs!"

An object from behind hit hard, very hard, & death. Wake, still here. But no more dreams. Dead in dreams. What to do. A hundred books about dreaming do not help, warn & speculate but do not advise.

Then dreams again but not like of old. These are the dreams of a dead man.

So, a mystery. He's not dead in waking life, but in dreams a kind of ghost. He can't deduce what.

"You will fail," says Grant.

"Was anything else ever possible?"

FTT motions Menace into the black throbbing mass that has enveloped his computer monitor & reaches near floor to near ceiling—Menace is between worlds anyway from the hard hit on Sally—he holds his breath, just in case, & dives in—

"Can you help me? I can't figure out what I'm supposed to do."

"You don't belong here. Why are you here?"

The noise & shouts at Luna T's bar raises up & up, more crowd in than usual, Mr. Bob the barman taps an already rather drunken Jimmy Reality to help him pour drinks. Jimmy pours one-for-you, one-for-me-style, & presses heavy the hard stuff, lighter & lighter the tonic, juice, rocks & so on—

A hookah appears at the bar & fills the air with a pillowy violet smoke—the music up & up, the noise & faces multiply, ahh, close, warm, how it raises—

The mass gathers around Menace & pulls him in with a thousand gelatinous fingers, & then recedes within computer monitor, & FTT can only watch. He taps the screen with a long burnt umber lacquered fingernail. Glass. "Figures," he pouts, & watches.

A day ten thousand years from now lands the hooked line, the plant a great undifferentiated living mass, & the hook is swallowed as though never there—

cliii.

What the new language will bear the next song? Will the song drip electrical strums & sprout a thousand feet toward the clouds? What will explode lovely every minute between pages, is there anything tonight not confession of old & new & next & multiple & conflicted want?

I ask, wonder, do not know, am nothing, noone yet here, this, pen blowing out wet ink on white quick drinking sheets, what then, who, why?

When the tape, rolls, nobody is ready, & the music begins, because it is always going somewhere, down deep, out there, who somewhere, where you, how time's a ruse, why?

Fingers one & multiple & countless make & make in a world of atoms nearing & releasing constantly—do you understand you are vital & nobody at all?

Why? Ask again. Why? Ask again.

cliv.

"Whatever it meant"

The Viking nods.

"Unconvinced?"

"It still means everything, if you let it. You know that."

"Live hours seem more laden with age, with presumption, with regret, with fear."

"If the worst to be feared is death then yet it does come."

"I don't know if death is the worst. I think decline is. Diminishing hope."

He nods.

"I think having less to say to anyone. Brute, wordless want. Loss of faith not in the universe, but in humanity. Nothing much changes. What to tell anyone about anything that matters?"

"Each decides. Each hour. Each day. Adds to a life's statement."

"And then what? Tell me the point in any of it!"

"A point?"

"A point."

"A point to a whole life?"

"A point."

"Would a life complex enough to seek a point end simply enough to have a point?"

Grant looks like a homeless tramp now as he endears to Luna T's bar by sweeping up the floor, collecting the pitchers off the table. I don't tell anyone who he is, not sure myself. Rebecca, like Merry Muse, dislikes him .

"Let him be, Beckah."

"I don't have to."

"Let him be. I mean it."

Grant smells. His large black garbage bag smells. He moves awkwardly & bumps things. Has the shakes of an old alkie but refuses drink, tells Mr. Bob to refuse him should he ever ask.

Franny talks to him. She knows small-town oddballs from her youth. Convinces him to shower once a week, on the vague, actually non-promise that she might one day scrub his shoulders.

He leaves me my distance mostly. I seem to interest him less.

"It's not you. It's whatever claim you ever had to authenticity."

"No more?"

"It's tricky because it's in your mind finally."

"I'm as indie as I feel myself to be?"

"In a way."

"I don't believe in a lot of things anymore. Maybe just the idea of progress. Maybe simple as hope."

"What ever was hope?"

"Hope is arrival onto new lands. A faith like clean water."

"Hope is also action. Good work. Hours at the task & accomplishment."

"Hope is fucking music like anything else worth shit."

"OK. Where's yours?"

"I don't know. Can hope be a love for defiance? Can hope be not for an event but rhythm? Can hope be moments of chocolate, of trying to take a photograph of the full moon—"

"Yah, Jack. All that."

"No?"

clv.

Soul's best weapon twined awfully of faith & doubt. Night bids follow & learn new. To Art upon a different pitch, tough as a bone, the bite of sugar & pink cheeks, old faiths.

What were they about, what toward when they existed full? I wrote, full of song, to absence. I've never understood anyone or anything, ever. No amount of years has told me anything overarching, save kindness connects, competition corrodes, violence does not fill as quickly as it empties, the best hours many are hidden or in hiding, memories live by their own will, love is an amoral force, desire many times more so.

Maya steps out again & looks at me.

"No."

"You can't control me. You ceded that power."

"No."

"Why should I scare you?"

"You're Dylan's."

"I'm *my own*."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why did you hurt me?"

"Who?"

"All of you. Each & every fucking last one of you. Why? That's all I've ever wanted to know. Why didn't any of you love me?"

"Do you want an answer?"

"I know the answer. Because life isn't fair, isn't pure, isn't anything in particular. It doesn't sum to any kind of explanation, does not devolve to a clear point, does not deduce, does not compute."

"Would you like me to return now?"

"Answer my question."

"Which?"

"Why did you hurt me?"

She sighs. "Because nobody is ever fully satisfied. What else?"

"It's only by stubbornness I am still writing this."

"You still have to say something. Lots of pages."

"You're sweeter to Dylan."

"It's what he likes. You want something else."

"I want truth."

"You want truth with a nice ass. You don't want molecular truth or superconductor truth. You don't want fungal or arachnoid truth. You want muse truth."

"Muse truth."

"Tell the truth but with a nice blush"

"That's it?"

She turns on me. "What else?"

"You're leaving?"

clvi.

Now Menace is within for real, he knows that, it's about time & his only thought is: save Maya.

Not fuck Maya?

No. Not really.

Not really.

I have to save her.

"She's over there."

Menace blinks. Coffee Time Coffee House. The room with the armchairs. There's Dylan, taller & skinnier than he looks on TV but still, that's Dylan.

John is a muscular dude. Not one you'd like to push for less than a life's endangering moment.

Maya is hard to see. She's . . . glowing. Glowing?

"Are you going to talk to her? Are you going to save her?"

"She's glowing!"

"Go nearer & see."

Dylan & John daunt him as real people. He didn't know this was possible. And what is this exactly? He knows his psychedelic film canon. *The Matrix*. *Waking Life*. *Mulholland Drive*. *Pi*. *Vanilla Sky*. What this then?

He approaches her slowly, hoping she will solidify, hoping he will become less scared.

Is he on the TV now? Is someone watching this? This is no set, there is no camera filming him. He feels a little disoriented but not unreal. Not filmed.

She glows more as he nears. It seems to take him forever to cross a few yards at most. How does he know it's her? Her pink & blonde hair. Soft cheeks, narrow chin. Very light blue eyes. But she won't clarify more than some & he does not near her no matter his countless paces.

John & Dylan are watching him not terribly friendly.

"What am I doing wrong?"

"She's not your friend."

"I have to save her."

"Does she look like she's in danger?"

He wants to tell them but how? You're on a TV show that's not a TV show which I've come to by hacking my computer to create a path from my bedroom to this place? Maya I think is going to sacrifice herself to allow a bad man's remorseful assistant to crush him, free his mostly willing captives, & I think that this all goes much further than any of those details imply?

"I need to tell her. Will you help me?"

Dylan & John consider him wordlessly. For all the complexities between them, especially involving Maya, they are a guarding wall between her & what amount of the encroaching world they can keep far—

Menace can wait, he realizes it's them whether they know it or not, jerks hard at each without thinking & falls backwards in her direction.

It works enough as he cracks their field around her & wedges partway in.

She looks up from what she's reading.

Menace can't breathe she's so pretty.

"Hi" she says softly.

He nods, terrified.

"Are you OK?" she can't tell his dilemma.

"Don't do it" he croaks in a whisper.

"Do what?" she half rises from her beat brown armchair. She knows what he means, panicked he knows too.

"I came to stop you. I love you."

John's powerful hands lift Menace up & through the air away from her, becoming black & gelatinous as he falls away hitting not the wall John intends him to strike but a mass receiving & swallowing him up again, pulling him toward his journey's start, the sniff of her pink heat choking his nose with desire & melancholy & fate.

clvii.

Arriving nearer the within's within, Noisy Children play younger & older both, nearer the place where the music does not cease nor resume, nearer, nearer, time neither is nor is not, place is no here no there these conceptions are not & thus control nothing affect nothing, the music swirls multiply all songs at once one song ever no differentiation turn on tune in drop out enough of an instruction? get on the bus is another yet there is no wavelength there is no bus, to put another way this is no spoon is that enough I don't know full the earth if you know

you are deep within it that you raise & there's still more that you fall & still there's more how to tell ink left to right what any of this is art while the ink not yet spread on paper, some thing like that perhaps are you listening? Noisy Children is playing for you & always have Noisy Children is playing me & always have what nearest to this how dreams seep & erupt & layers of them concurrently & consecutively & yet flick them like ripples & they become another & several & many & they open out to something near nearer the same but not a burst two countless none tell it go on or it will tell you or sing by your own creation or not within's within within's within within's—

What's left? What isn't?

clviii.

Why? Question of blood, heart, thighs, dream. Question hard & fair, run through trunk & seed, flight, bone. God to all questions, companion every hour, ripples & glare, undulation, powerfully unknown—

Dead is dead yet here I sit in this bar & I don't know what to do, they watch the TV up in the corner awhile, quietly, I've never seen a tavern slow & stop for television, but they listen, lean forward, I forget for a moment my situation—the girl is so pretty—I remember something far off—

then remember all this & it whelms all else.

The bartender offers me a drink. I look at him helpless & wordless. He nods & smiles. Looks over now & again as though protecting me.

I am dead. I don't know what that means. My dreams know but I wake up & here I am in a body.

A breath. A beat. Another. They keep coming.

clix.

“Tell me it means anything”

“Which?”

“Any of it. Tell me why I care”

“Do you not care?”

“I doubt. I doubt any importance in anything. Habit is not faith. Good will is not faith.

Loyalty is not faith. *Love is not faith.*”

“Do you love?”

“I do. Love is want. Love is absence of completeness.

“I don't believe in progress. Time explains nothing, predicts nothing. Inventorying property & successions of dead is not explanation

“I really question it all. Faith is an explanation believed, or unneeded.”

The old man leans back & closes his eyes.

clx.

Beloved,

to continue this letter nearer conclusion of this book, no closer the answer, or even the question save bluntly spoke: Why?

I don't know. I started asking this question a long time ago. I think it involved others, why they didn't like me. I had no awareness that was no local, or TV-generated, human concerns. I hardly knew the world. I was barely anyone.

When I began to write I began to wake up. It took years. It's still going on. Does it ever end?

What I feel often is helpless. I don't know if anything I've ever done has mattered, or how that could even be measured.

I met a guru in last night's dreaming. We argued whether the question or the answer matters more.

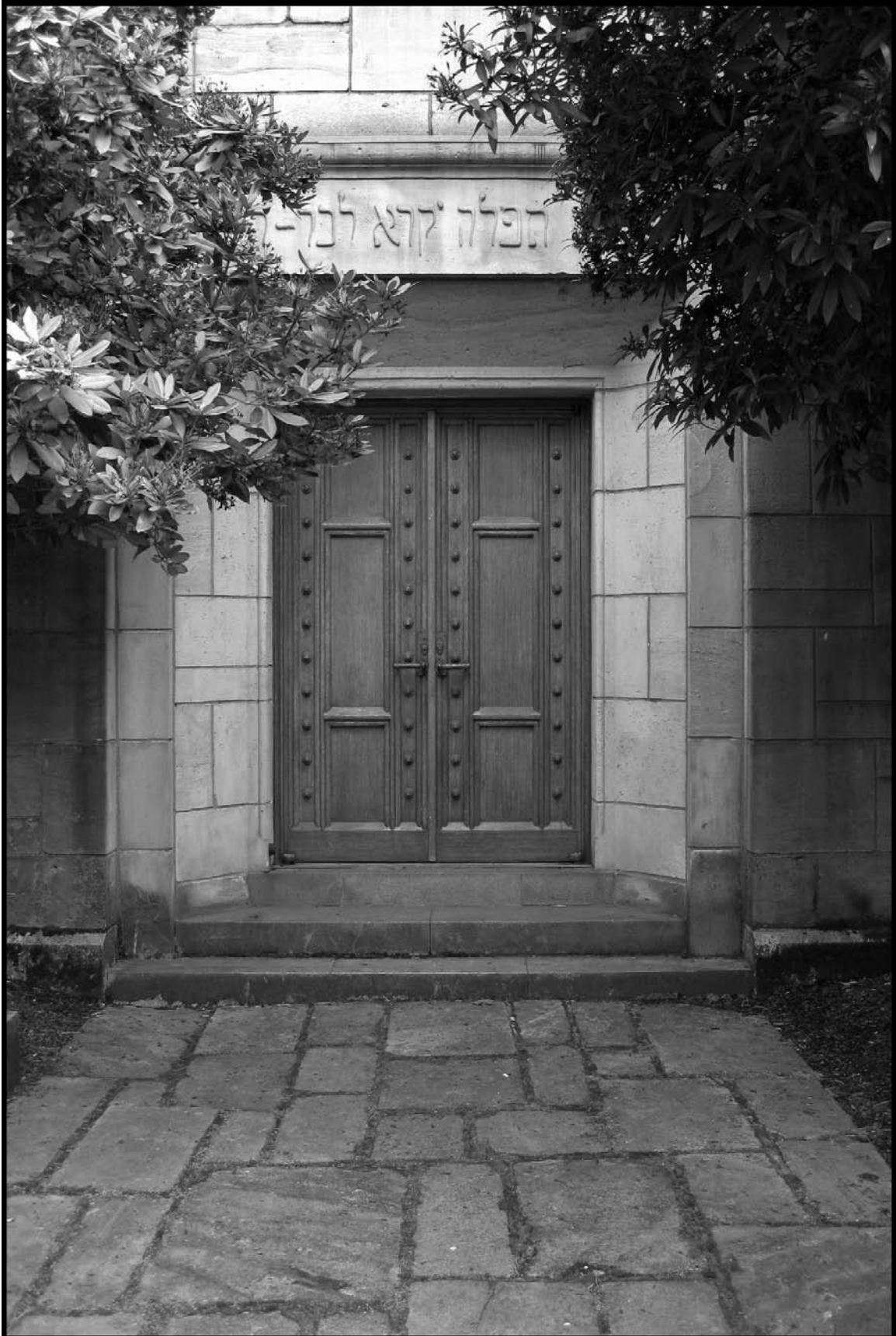
I say the question. Whatever it is.



To be continued in Cenacle | 69 | June 2009

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Ralph H. Emerson

C & G Again: Gleaming Skin

[Essay]

In *Cenacle* 67, I called the letters C and G the “Gobbling Gutturals” because their “guh” and “cuh” sounds make them perfect for ‘mouth’ and ‘throat’ words like *gobbling*, *crunching*, *croaking*. Yet the same letters can also stand for ‘skin’ of any sort: *crusts* on bread, *glaze* on pottery, *scum* on ponds—any ‘surface’.¹ You can easily see why just by saying “guh” or “cuh.” Can you feel your tongue briefly flattening against the roof of your mouth as you say them? By *cleaving* there, your tongue is pantomiming the idea of “touching a surface,” of *grazing* the *ground*. The surface it’s touching is your soft palate or velum, which gives C and G their technical name *velar sounds* (“veeler”). Their tongue-pantomime of ‘flattening’ is almost unique: you won’t feel it by saying “muh” or “tuh” or most other consonants; and that flattening is why any C or G word that isn’t reserved for ‘mouth’ imagery is probably busy with ‘surfaces’ instead.

‘Surface’ and ‘mouth’ words mingle in the dictionary: *crust* beside *crunch*, *ground* between *groan* and *growl*. The surest giveaway of a ‘surface’ word is an *sc-* or *sk-* as in the word *skin* itself: *scorza* in Italian, *skutos* in Greek, *skura* in Russian—all ‘skin or hide’.² (Some Germanic words soften *sk-* into *sh-*, as in *shaggy*, *shave*, *sheep*.) The *gl-* in *gleam* also has some very specific ‘surface’ connotations; and *cr-* often has them even when it is broken up by a vowel, as in Spanish *cortar* (*c-r*) or Japanese *kiru* (*k-r*), both meaning ‘cut’. In most human languages, a *k* sound, particularly near *s* or *r*, is a linguistic danger sign; and when the prototypical ‘surface’ is skin, the matching danger, rooted in ancient fears of slashing bear claws, is ‘cutting’, dealt with at the end of this article.

Skin Itself

Here are some more words for human skin. Just look at their first few letters, all velar in different ways: Latin *cutis*, Russian *kozha*, Gaelic *craiceann*, Indonesian *kulit*, Egyptian Arabic *gild*. In our sister language Danish, skin is *skind*, and ‘beard’ is *skag*, akin to our word *shaggy*. Shaggy white *sheep* are named for the fleece they wear. Fish wear *scales*. Mollusks and *crustaceans* wear *shells* that clank away right in their names: *clam*, *cockle*, *crab*, *crayfish*, *scallop*, *shrimp*, *krill*; likewise *scarabs* and *scorpions*. And while mammal skins fleck off in little bits of *scabs* or *scurf* dandruff, a snake can *shed* its skin all at once. In Indonesian, where human skin is *kulit*, a snakeskin is a *kelongsong*. The Somali word *qolof* means ‘snakeskin’ too—as well as ‘dandruff, scab, scales, shell, bark, peel’!

Skin is vulnerable. If it’s not *scalded*, *scorched*, *scourged*, *scarred*, *scarified*, *scotched*, or *scathed*, it can be *gouged*, *gored*, *clawed*, *grated*, *shredded*, or *skinned* off altogether. It suffers scabs in *scabies*, scurf in *scurvy*, rashes in *shingles*. When people go skin-to-skin in a fight, it’s a *scrap*, *scrape*, *scuffle*, *scrum*, *scrimmage*; when they have sex, it’s *screw*, *score*, *scam*, *scrump*, *shack*, *shag*. The Romans did it too: *scortum* ‘skin’ made *scortere* ‘screw’. Cleaning skin and hair is called *grooming*, as in *shampooing* and *showering*; and the Greek verb for rubbing in lotion was *chriein*, whence the name of *Christ*, the ‘Anointed One’.

Color and beauty are skin ideas too. *Color* is from *kel-*, an ancient root for ‘covering’, and *chromatic* ‘colorful’ is from *chrōma*, a Greek word that originally meant ‘skin’ or ‘complexion’. Indeed, most velar colors still match human complexions: ‘Red’ is *scarlet* or *crimson*, Russian *krasnyi*. ‘Yellow’ is *golden*, Greek *chrysōps*, Japanese *kiroi*. I’m not sure about white, but ‘black’—well, the Turkmen desert of

Kara Kum means ‘Black Sands’, Japanese *Kuroshio* is the ‘Black Current’, and the Hindi name of the Andaman Islands is *Kala Pani*, meaning ‘Black Water’, just as *Kali* the goddess is the ‘Black One’.

Bodyscapes

Words for ‘beautiful’ are very similar: Russian *krasivyi*, Japanese *kirei* and *karen*, Somali *quruh*, and a bit closer to home, Greek *kalli-* in *calligraphy*, Danish *skøn*, German *schön*. Beauty is aesthetic and, as Susan Sontag once wrote, “the aesthete’s sensibility . . . typically affirms the pleasures and wisdom of the visual; that is, of surfaces.” What is vision but a kind of touching? We “rest our eyes upon” a thing or “run our eyes over” it as if eyes were fingers for caressing strange skins: *scan*, *scope*, *scrutinize*. But an exclusive concern for superficial beauty makes us *shallow*, caring only for what *shows*; and it blinds us to the inner natures of things, for to eyes that cannot see beneath, the skin of a thing is the thing itself. A few Danish terms illustrate this nicely. The Danish word *skin* means ‘appearance’, like German *Schein*. Danish *skabelon* ‘form’ is cogante with our *shape*, and *skaber* ‘shaper’ has the same force as our *creator*. A *shapely* thing is *godt skabt* or well formed; and *skøn*, of course, is ‘beautiful’. Beauty’s only skin deep.

As an outer layer, a skin defines anything beneath as a discrete object, even if that object is only a wood frame stretched with muslin. If it’s solid, so much the better. The *crust* defines the bread, the *glaze* the pot, the *clapboards* the house. The world’s layers peel back one after the other. The core of the body is the *skeleton*, most noticeable at bony parts like *shins*, *clavicles*, *scapulas* or *shoulder-blades*, and the *scalp* atop the *skull*. (Thin people are *skinny* or *scrawny* because they’re “all skin and bones.”) The Latin word for the flesh that clothes our bones is *caro*, whence Spanish *carne* ‘meat’; and flesh and bones layered together become a *corpus* or ‘body’. This in turn we *clothe* with *garments*, many of these being velar as well, from *skivvies*, *skirt*, *kilt*, *gown*, *coat*, *shirt*, *cloak*, *cape* to *shoes*, *gloves*, *cap*, and *scarf*.

To protect his body further, a soldier might add a *shield* (Latin *scutum* or *clipeum*), plus a *sheath* or *scabbard* to hide his sword. To ‘clothe’, ‘hide’, and ‘protect’ are all much the same. A big piece of cloth can make a *cloak* to cover you or a *screen* to hide you, and really big pieces of cloth become *sheets* or *covers* to warm you—even tents to *shelter* you from the wind and rain. It’s the same in other languages: Greek for ‘clothing’ was *skeuē*, while ‘shelter’ and ‘tent’ were *skepē* and *skēnē*. Russian and Danish *skryt* and *skjule* both mean to ‘hide’, and German *schützen* and *schätzen* are ‘protect’ and ‘cherish’.

Landscapes

Outdoors, we are sheltered by the dome of the *sky*, and stand upon the *ground* where the *grass grows green*—three words that share a single root (*ghrē-*) because our linguistic ancestors lived in a moist and grassy climate. Without greenery on top, earth’s *crust* is just rocks: *craggy* mountains, *quartz* and *granite cliffs*, *scaly* slopes *carpeted* in *gravel* and *scree* (‘loose stone’), *coarse* and *gritty* deserts, plains *calcified* and *sclerotic* (‘hardened’) from drought, mud flats *cracked* in the sun, *crinkled* plants *crackling* to the touch.

Is it any wonder that early humans migrated a lot? Getting to greener pastures meant walking, so words for ‘movement across a surface’ are a big deal: *scamper*, *skitter*, *scurry*, *skip town*, *skedaddle*. Even if *walk* and *run* aren’t velar, at least *gallop* and *gallivant* are, and *go* itself originally meant ‘walk’, like Russian *gulyat’*. Latin *gradus* is ‘step’, and ‘run’ is *currere*, the root of *current* and *courier*. Adding a wheel or two makes *cars*, *carts*, and *carriages*. The eeriest similarities across time and distance in ‘movement’ words involve reduplicative roots with repeated consonants: Australian Gooniyandi *girarr-* and Somali *gurguranayya* both mean ‘crawl’, for instance; Gooniyandi *girrgirr-* and Japanese *goro-goro suru* are both ‘roll along’, and *galgal* is Hebrew for ‘wheel’.³

If you’d rather go by water, the words are still pretty similar. The long ship of the Norse gods was named *Skidbladnir*, a glorious craft that *scudded* along like clouds in the wind. The modern Danish *skib* is akin to our *ship* and *skipper*. All sorts of watercraft have velar names, from *kayaks*, *canoes*, and *coracles*

to *scows*, *skiffs*, *sculls*, *schooners*, *Jet-Skis*, *Chris-Craft*; and finally the big *galleons* and other sailing ships of the past: *galleys*, *carracks*, *caravels*, and *clippers*. Each of those is a ‘surface’ word, for all these craft were built (as an old Patagonia catalogue put it) to go “skimming the skin of the sea.”

Ice (and Light)

When water’s skin freezes, *glaciers glint* in the sun. ‘Gleaming’ is a specialized sense of *gl-*, as the linguists Jespersen and Bloomfield noted early in the last century.⁴ Bloomfield’s list of phonaesthemes in *Language* famously linked the *gl-* in *glow*, *glare*, *glint*, *gleam* to the notion of “unmoving light.” But a prototypical surface is surely involved as well—namely ‘ice’, Latin *glacies*; for the brightest thing our ancestors ever saw was ice glittering in the sun. This is why *gl* and *k-r* so often express the related ideas of ‘ice’, ‘glitter’, and ‘vision’. In Japanese, for example, ‘ice’ is *kōri*, to ‘glitter’ is *kira-kira suru*, and to be ‘dazzled or blinded’ is *kuramu*. English ice *glitters* and *glistens*, dazzling brightness is *glory*, personal radiance is *glamour*, diamonds (another kind of “ice”) are *glitzy*, and moist eyes *glisten* and *glance*.

Strangely enough, *gl-* can represent darkness as well as light. Jespersen illustrated this with a phrase from a novel: “The *gloom* of night, relieved only by the *gleam* from the street-lamp.” The reason for this double sense came to me one night in a dark barn lit by a single lantern. The distant corners were lost in *gloom*, but near the lantern, the walls and floor (surfaces, you see) were *glowing* yellow, criss-crossed by *shadows* as we moved around. Chiaroscuro: the sun *shines* in the open while it’s *shady* under the trees, and campfires *scintillate* (‘sparkle’) while the forest beyond stays ob-*scure* (‘shadowed’). One French word for describing firelight is *clarté*, and fiery heat is Latin *calidus* ‘hot’, akin to *scald* and *caliente* (and the reason C means ‘hot’ in European showers).

But you can see fire anywhere. Ice is special, found only in winter, and providing a surface like no other in nature. It’s *clear* and translucent, like *glass* and *glaze*, which are both from Latin *glacies* ‘ice’, just as *crystal* is from *kryсталlos*, the Greek for ice. (Japanese, once again, is *kōri*.) Ice is smooth and *glossy*, so smooth talkers are *glib*, and ‘smooth’ itself is *glatt* in German, *glaphyros* in Greek, *gladkii* in Russian. ‘Moving on a smooth surface’ is *gliding* or *skating*; on snow it’s *skiing*. Finally, ice is ‘chilly to the touch’, the opposite of fire’s heat; and Latin *gelidus* ‘frozen’ is related to our *cool* and *cold*.

We seem to admire chilliness in English: *cool as a cucumber*; *cool and calculating*; *calm*, *cool*, and *collected*; or just plain *cool*. One of America’s five C/K presidents was frankly named *Coolidge*, and the only two-termers among those five were *Clinton* and *Cleveland*. I hear icy echoes of *clean* and *clear* in those names, plus the L associated with light. Who’s the good witch? *Glinda*. What’s Superman’s real name? *Clark Kent*. When I wrote about ‘mouth’ words, I emphasized the toothy menace that lurks in *Cr-* names like *Cropper*, but there’s little of that menace to be found in *Cl-* or plain C. Fictional *Catherines* tend to be good people, for instance, and millions of American parents have fallen in love with fashionable plain-C names like *Cody*, *Caleb*, and *Caitlin*.

Dirt (and Crowds)

Maybe ice is clean, but *grimy* old dirt *clumps* up and sticks to everything in sight. As I suggested earlier, the ‘stickiness’ in words like *cleave* and *glue* reflects the way the tongue sticks to the top of the mouth when we say “guh” or “kuh.” This is especially noticeable when the next letter is *l*, and indeed ‘stickiness’ is the first quality that anybody ever noticed about velar onsets. Specifically, it’s what Plato noticed about *gl-* as he was musing on etymology in *Cratylus* around 370 B.C. After citing the Greek word *kollōdes* ‘gluey’, Plato said that *gl-* expresses “a glutinous clammy nature, as in *glischros* ‘glutinous’, *glykys* ‘sweet’, *gloiōdes* ‘gummy’.” He didn’t mention dirt, but the more you think about it, the better it fits as a prototype for words of that class.

Fertile earth is lusciously dark and gummy: *glue*, *glom*, *cleave*, *cling*. The stickiest earth has *clay*

in it; and if you pick up a handful of moist clay soil, it will remain a solid *cluster* in your fingers, a *clod* massed together by its own stickiness. That's why roundish things so often have *cl-* or *gl-* names. Greek *glēnē* and *glutos* were 'eyeball' and 'rump'. Latin *gleba* was a clod of earth, a *glomersamum* was any 'rounded mass', and *globus*, our *globe*, was 'sphere'. In English, a lump of coal is a *clinker*, a lumpish person is a *clod* or *klutz*, clusters of vapor in the sky are *clouds*, and cluster fruits are *grapes*.

People cluster into *groups* and *crowds*. A work group is a *squad* or *crew*, friends are *cronies*, supporters are *cliques*, "*kith* and *kin*" make a *clan*. Any social group can have a velar name: *club*, *class*, *clique*, *guild*, *gang*, *coterie*, *cabal*, *cadre*, plus all those using the prefix *con-* 'with', like *congress*, *company*, *committee*. Why do we work and play in crowds? Because we're *gregarious*, from Latin *grex* 'flock', one of many velar collective words for non-humans: a *clowder* of cats, a *clutch* of chicks, a *covey* of quail, a *gaggle* of geese, a *grist* of bees, a *school* of fish, a *gam* of whales.

Clusters aside, the most striking thing about dirt is that it's dirty: *grubby*, *grotty*, *grungy*, *greasy*, *gunky*, *gooey*. And it's always looking for surfaces to stick to. Adams and Lloyd's humorous dictionary of made-up words has *cromarty* for the "brittle sludge that clings to the top of ketchup bottles" and *klosters* for the "blobs of dried urine" that collect under toilet seats.⁵ To get rid of *crud* like that requires thorough *cleaning*, and here the *sc-*s are put to work, as in *scrub*, *scrape*, *scour*, *squeegee*. I knew a boy who invented a plaque-scraper for his teeth that he called—remember this word?—a *scree*, which also happens to be the standard name for a tool used to smooth wet cement.

Many languages use *sk-* for dirtiness itself. Greek *skybalon*, Russian *skvernyi*, and Danish *skidt* all mean 'filth(y)'. Dirty people are tagged with very similar names. A dirty boy at Eton was a *scug*, and slimy men are *scuzzy*, *sleezy*, *scuzzballs*, *scumbags*. Pot-scrubbing *scullery maids* were at the bottom rung of the servant ladder, and dirty women are still *scrubbers* in England, *skanks* in America. Viking explorers dubbed American Indians *Skraelings*, which is said to mean 'dirty ones' (though I've also seen it explained as 'screamers'). 'Wickedness' is dirty too: *scabs* cross union pickets for the fat cats, *schemers* perform their *skulduggery* in the shadows, *scamps* and *scalawags* shake things up, and *scapegoats* take the fall. Greek *skiraphos* was 'trickery', and Latin *scelus* referred to 'crimes' and 'scoundrels' alike—*Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, as the movie calls them!

Flint-Hearted

The same *sc-* fits easily into villains' names: sneaky *Scaramouche* in the old commedia dell'arte, nasty Baron *Scarpia* in *Tosca*, the Bond villain *Scaramanga*, sneering *Scree* (!) in a TV sequel to *Huckleberry Finn*, cruel Miss *Scatcherd* in *Jane Eyre*, the "evil rat-men" *Skaven* in a fantasy game, C. S. Lewis's crafty demon *Screwtop*, and indeed *Old Scratch* himself. What's the root of all evil? Money, another kind of *scratch*, because you have to claw around for it. A Brit's wages are his "*screw*," and the wageless get *screwed*. The *hardscrabble* poor barely *scrape* by, trying to *scratch* out a living while dodging *scams* that would *skim* away their dollars like *cream* from milk; and *scavengers* *skulk* along the windy streets, *scrounging* for *scanty* meals of *crusts* and *scraps*. These guys are "on *skid row*" in New York, "haven't a *skerrick*" in Sydney, or simply *skint* ('skinned') in London.

When Mona Charen says conservatives are "caricatured as *skinflints* who would take *crusts* of bread from the mouths of starving children," she must be thinking of Dickens's "*grasping*, *scraping*" old *Scrooge*. We briefly discussed his name among the velar 'mouth' words, but I didn't say where it came from. It's a pun: *screw* was Victorian slang for 'miser', so the other characters in *A Christmas Carol* referred to Scrooge behind his back as "old screw" and "Old Scratch," and Dickens deftly blended these into *Screwtop* and thus *Scrooge*. It's one of the truly great names in fiction, its ferocious *scr-* simultaneously suggesting age, ill temper, greed, and stinginess. Dickens reached deep into the collective unconscious for it—and pulled out a word with a near-perfect match in distant Russia. Would you believe that Russian for 'miser' is *skryaga*?

Scratching

Miserly scratching brings us to the second great phylum of ‘surface’ words, those that involve ‘cutting’. If the danger in velar ‘mouth’ words reflects the *clamping* down of open jaws—*clench*, *crush*, *squeeze*—the danger in ‘skin’ words reflects the linear cuts made by *claws* swiping across bare skin—*scratching*, *scoring*, *skiving*. The double nature of velars (mouth *or* skin) is best grasped by poets, as when Rudyard Kipling compared “the *greedy* Ga-sound” to “the *scratchy*, hurty Ka-sound.”⁶ It’s also apparent in the letter shapes: hard G and C visually suggest open mouths, while C’s phonetic equivalent K shows the claws. Literally so: the four spikes of a K historically represent four scratchy little fingers, all spread out. Scholars have known for a century or more that K’s modern shape evolved from an Egyptian hieroglyph showing a human hand (by way of an intermediate form like this: ✎), and the original hieroglyph is also recalled in K’s Semitic name kaph, which literally means ‘palm of the hand’.

What is a hieroglyph, anyway? It’s a *groove* produced by carving in rock. Greek *glyphein* means ‘to carve’, and *hieroglyphs* are ‘priestly carvings’. Greek *graphein* is likewise to ‘scratch or write’ (as in *graphics* and *graffiti*), and *gramma* is a letter. Many similar words echo related ideas: *sketch*, *carve*, *engrave*, *scrimshaw*. Latin *scribere* ‘write’ is the source of *scribe*, *scribble*, *script* and many European verbs like *écrire*, *escribir*, *schreiben* (*The Cenacle* is published by *Scriptor* Press). Even unrelated verbs for ‘write’ may have *k-r* onsets, like Finnish *kirjoittaa* and Somali *qorayya*. Japanese for ‘scratch or write’ is *kaku*, and a ‘writer’—a scribbler—is a *sakka*.

Of course, writing and drawing are pretty elegant uses of scratching. Animals *scratch* and *claw* mostly to get their suppers, defend themselves, and climb into trees. In French, a cat’s claw is a *griffe*, scratching is *gratter*, and climbing *gravir*. I noticed the *claw-climb* connection one day as I watched a cat *scrambling* up a garden wall; compare Latin *scandere* ‘climb’ and *scala* ‘ladder’. Greek for ladder is *climax*!

Cutting

A deep scratch is a *cut*, the kind of claw mark you put a Band-Aid on. An awful lot of languages mimic English in using velar verbs for ‘cut’, and often for *kill* as well. Japanese *hara-kiri* is literally ‘belly-cutting’, for example, *kiru* being ‘to cut’ and *korosu* ‘to kill’. Indonesian *gorok* means both ‘cut’ and ‘kill’. Other verbs for ‘cut’ include *kālai* in Hawaiian, *k’os* in Mayan, *kirkirayya* in Somali, *kroit* in Russian, *cortar* in Spanish, *couper* in French. An object that looks ‘cut off’ is *short*, *corto*, *court*, *kurz*.

And ‘cutting instruments’? A gladiator’s sword is a *gladius*, a Malay pirate’s sword a *kris*, a Highlander’s dagger a *sgian* (“skeen”). English cutting tools include *scoop*, *scalpel*, their false siblings *scythe*, *scissors*, *scimitar* (with suggestive silent *c*’s), and their *sh-* cousins *shiv*, *shank*, *shovel*, *shears*—all equally nice and *sharp*. Another important ‘cutting’ word is *shit* (akin to Danish *skid*, Greek *skatos* ‘scat’), which earns its name by ‘falling away’ from the body, just as *scraps* fall away when you *sculpt* wood with a knife.

And as always among the velars, we’re going to meet villains. Some are ‘scratchy’ like *Scrooge*, some are ‘toothy’ like the man-eater *Grendel*, and some of them frankly ‘cut’: *Scar* in the *The Lion King*, any number of *Scarfaces*, “Jigsaw” *Kramer* in the *Saw* movies, and of course Freddy *Krueger* with his razor-fingered glove (a modern bear claw). A few names slash away with great explicitness. Scorsese’s *Gangs of New York* calls its knife-happy villain Bill *Cutting*. The book *Mind Catcher* has a mad scientist Dr. *Cleaver*, and there’s a Dr. *Cutler* in Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, a novel whose other doctors are called *Creamer*, *Cackle*, *Gollop*, *Clump*, and *Squills*. Literature has a lot of velar physicians: it’s not for nothing that doctors were once called *croakers* and *sawbones*.

Mind and Eye

Fiction also has a lot of velar psychiatrists—Bruce Willis’s Dr. Crowe in *The Sixth Sense*, for instance, or Dr. Alicia Crowe in *Bedlam Burning*, who resembles her own patients in being *crazy* (like Kramer on *Seinfeld*). There’s also James Patterson’s gumshoe-shrink Alex Cross, the headshrinking Crane brothers on *Frasier*, the “devilishly clever” Dr. Krokowski in *The Magic Mountain*, and Dr. Gregorovious in *Tender Is the Night*, whom the story links, in a nice touch, to the real-life psychiatric pioneer Kraepelin. What does craziness have to do with surfaces? Our usual metaphors for madness see the mind as a fragile piece of pottery. The word *crazy* recalls the way pottery glaze shatters over time into cobwebs of tiny cracks called *crazing*, and other expressions describe the shattering of the pot itself. A soldier in Jack Schaefer’s novella *Company of Cowards* calls himself “a *cracked crock*” who “went to pieces” under fire—a *crackpot* who went *crackers*.

Or else the mind is seen as a hunk of cheese that can knifed in two: Greek *schism* ‘rift’ makes *schizophrenic* ‘split-headed’. In healthy minds, this metaphor is reversed, turning the brain itself into a knife that explores its surroundings by cutting them open. Indo-European *skei-* ‘cut’ is the root of *science* ‘knowing’, and we “sharpen” our *skills* so we can “cut a swath” through our chosen field. A good mind is *keen* and *sharp* as a new scythe, and “sharp” people are *crafty*, *clever*, *shrewd*. Do these words for ‘knowing’ remind you of the ‘looking’ words I mentioned earlier? There’s *scan*, *scope*, *scrutinize*; the *scouts* who search for us, and the *skeptics* (‘examiners’) who must see for themselves. Good eyes are as *sharp* and *keen* as good brains. Enemies “look daggers” at each other, and wise men cut away the fat to “see into the heart” of things.

English has several phonaesthemes for ‘vision’. If *sk-* words cut like a knife, the “piercing” eyes of *(s)p-* “see right through you”: *peer*, *peek*, *spy*, *spectate*. John Lawler thinks *bl-* vision pays tribute to the moist *bubble* of the eyeball: *blink*, *bleary*, *blur*; *blood*, *blaze*, *black*.⁷ Plain *g-* likens eyes to *gaping* mouths: *gape*, *gawk*, *gaze*, *goggle*, *google*, *ogle*, *agog*. And *gl-* pays tribute to ice again: *glittering* eyes, a *gleam* in one’s eye. Greeks called owls *glauk* on account of their reflective eyes, and old-time jazzmen called eyes *glims*. Russian for eye is *glaz*, and *glyadet* is ‘to look’, like our *glimpse*, *glance*, *glare*. It’s entirely appropriate that ‘eye’ and ‘surface’ words should converge here, for what can eyes see of the world except its surfaces? Skin, clothes, sky, complexions, the ground beneath our feet, lakes frozen flat under winter sun—all those gleaming skins, all those zillion-bubbled sheets of electron candy-shells that make up the visible faces of everything we see: clouds, grass, man, woman, tree, snake, apple.

Endnotes

¹ Ralph H. Emerson, “C & G: Gobbling Gutturals,” *The Cenacle* 67 (December 2008), p.32

² The usual velar-onset paradigm in Europe is [(s) k (r, l, w)-] > [(r)l-]; elsewhere it’s [kV(r, l)-], each [k] varying with [g] (and/or [q]). It’s hard to overstate how common such words are; every major semantic class in this article could be matched with Indonesian words of the second type alone (e.g., *gilang* ‘gleaming’). In English, spelling often masks an onset’s true simplicity: plain [g] in *get*, *ghost*, *guess*; [k] in *cold*, *kiss*, *chemist*, *quick*. And note that a few exceptional ‘mouth’ words do begin with *sk-* and *sh-*, mostly ones for *squeezing* or yelling: *scream*, *screech*, *shriek*, *shout*.

³ See William B. McGregor, “Sound Symbolism in Gooniyandi,” *WORD* 47 (1996), p. 346.

⁴ Otto Jespersen, *Language* (1922), §20.6; and Leonard Bloomfield, *Language* (1933), p. 245.

⁵ Douglas Adams and John Lloyd, *The Deeper Meaning of Liff* (1990).

⁶ “How the Alphabet Was Made,” *Just So Stories* (1902).

⁷ In “Women, Men, and Bristly Things,” *Michigan Working Papers in Linguistics* (1990).

Fyodor Dostoevsky



The Dream of a Ridiculous Man

[Classic Fiction]

Chapter I

I am a ridiculous person. Now they call me a madman. That would be a promotion if it were not that I remain as ridiculous in their eyes as before. But now I do not resent it, they are all dear to me now, even when they laugh at me—and, indeed, it is just then that they are particularly dear to me. I could join in their laughter—not exactly at myself, but through affection for them, if I did not feel so sad as I look at them. Sad because they do not know the truth and I do know it. Oh, how hard it is to be the only one who knows the truth! But they won't understand that. No, they won't understand it.

In old days I used to be miserable at seeming ridiculous. Not seeming, but being. I have always been ridiculous, and I have known it, perhaps, from the hour I was born. Perhaps from the time I was seven years old I knew I was ridiculous. Afterwards I went to school, studied at the university and, do you know, the more I learned, the more thoroughly I understood that I was ridiculous. So that it seemed in the end as though all the sciences I studied at the university existed only to prove and make evident to me, as I went more deeply into them, that I was ridiculous. It was the same with life as it was with science. With every year the same consciousness of the ridiculous figure I cut in every relation grew and strengthened. Everyone always laughed at me. But not one of them knew or guessed that if there were one man on earth who knew better than anybody else that I was absurd, it was myself, and what I resented most of all was that they did not know that. But that was my own fault; I was so proud that nothing would have ever induced me to tell it to anyone. This pride grew in me with the years; and if it had happened that I allowed myself to confess to anyone that I was ridiculous, I believe that I should have blown out my brains the same evening. Oh, how I suffered in my early youth from the fear that I might give way and confess it to my schoolfellows. But since I grew to manhood, I have for some unknown reason become calmer, though I realized my awful characteristic more fully every year. I say “unknown,” for to this day I cannot tell why it was. Perhaps it was owing to the terrible misery that was growing in my soul through something which was of more consequence than anything else about me: that something was the conviction that had come upon me that nothing in the world mattered. I had long had an inkling of it, but the full realization came last year almost suddenly. I suddenly felt that it was all the same to me whether the world existed or whether there had never been anything at all: I began to feel with all my being that there was nothing existing. At first I fancied that many things had existed in the past, but afterwards I guessed that there never had been anything in the past either, but that it had only seemed so for some reason. Little by little I guessed that there would be nothing in the future either. Then I left off being angry with people and almost ceased to notice them. Indeed this showed itself even in the pettiest trifles: I used, for instance,

to knock against people in the street. And not so much from being lost in thought: what had I to think about? I had almost given up thinking by that time; nothing mattered to me. If at least I had solved my problems! Oh, I had not settled one of them, and how many there were! But I gave up caring about anything, and all the problems disappeared.

And it was after that that I found out the truth. I learnt the truth last November—on the third of November, to be precise—and I remember every instant since. It was a gloomy evening, one of the gloomiest possible evenings. I was going home at about eleven o'clock, and I remember that I thought that the evening could not be gloomier. Even physically. Rain had been falling all day, and it had been a cold, gloomy, almost menacing rain, with, I remember, an unmistakable spite against mankind. Suddenly between ten and eleven it had stopped, and was followed by a horrible dampness, colder and damper than the rain, and a sort of steam was rising from everything, from every stone in the street, and from every by-lane if one looked down it as far as one could. A thought suddenly occurred to me, that if all the street lamps had been put out it would have been less cheerless, that the gas made one's heart sadder because it lighted it all up. I had had scarcely any dinner that day, and had been spending the evening with an engineer, and two other friends had been there also. I sat silent—I fancy I bored them. They talked of something rousing and suddenly they got excited over it. But they did not really care, I could see that, and only made a show of being excited. I suddenly said as much to them. "My friends," I said, "you really do not care one way or the other." They were not offended, but they laughed at me. That was because I spoke without any note of reproach, simply because it did not matter to me. They saw it did not, and it amused them.

As I was thinking about the gas lamps in the streets I looked up at the sky. The sky was horribly dark, but one could distinctly see tattered clouds, and between them fathomless black patches. Suddenly I noticed in one of these patches a star, and began watching it intently. That was because that star had given me an idea: I decided to kill myself that night. I had firmly determined to do so two months before and, poor as I was, I bought a splendid revolver that very day, and loaded it. But two months had passed and it was still lying in my drawer; I was so utterly indifferent that I wanted to seize a moment when I would not be so indifferent—why, I don't know. And so for two months every night that I came home I thought I would shoot myself. I kept waiting for the right moment. And so now this star gave me a thought. I made up my mind that it should certainly be that night. And why the star gave me the thought I don't know.

And just as I was looking at the sky, this little girl took me by the elbow. The street was empty, and there was scarcely anyone to be seen. A cabman was sleeping in the distance in his cab. It was a child of eight with a kerchief on her head, wearing nothing but a wretched little dress all soaked with rain, but I noticed her wet broken shoes and I recall them now. They caught my eye particularly. She suddenly pulled me by the elbow and called me. She was not weeping, but was spasmodically crying out some words which could not utter properly, because she was shivering and shuddering all over. She was in terror about something, and kept crying, "Mammy, mammy!" I turned facing her, I did not say a word and went on; but she ran, pulling at me, and there was that note in her voice which in frightened children means despair. I know that sound. Though she did not articulate the words, I understood that her mother was dying, or that something of the sort was happening to them, and that she had run out to call someone, to find something to help her mother. I did not go with her; on the contrary, I had an impulse to drive her away. I told her first to go to a policeman. But clasping her hands, she ran

beside me sobbing and gasping, and would not leave me. Then I stamped my foot and shouted at her. She called out “Sir! sir! . . .” but suddenly abandoned me and rushed headlong across the road. Some other passerby appeared there, and she evidently flew from me to him.

I mounted up to my fifth floor. I have a room in a flat where there are other lodgers. My room is small and poor, with a garret window in the shape of a semicircle. I have a sofa covered with American leather, a table with books on it, two chairs and a comfortable arm-chair, as old as old can be, but of the good old-fashioned shape. I sat down, lighted the candle, and began thinking. In the room next to mine, through the partition wall, a perfect bedlam was going on. It had been going on for the last three days. A retired captain lived there, and he had half a dozen visitors, gentlemen of doubtful reputation, drinking vodka and playing stoss with old cards. The night before there had been a fight, and I know that two of them had been for a long time engaged in dragging each other about by the hair. The landlady wanted to complain, but she was in abject terror of the captain. There was only one other lodger in the flat, a thin little regimental lady, on a visit to Petersburg, with three little children who had been taken ill since they came into the lodgings. Both she and her children were in mortal fear of the captain, and lay trembling and crossing themselves all night, and the youngest child had a sort of fit from fright. That captain, I know for a fact, sometimes stops people in the Nevsky Prospect and begs. They won't take him into the service, but strange to say (that's why I am telling this), all this month that the captain has been here his behavior has caused me no annoyance. I have, of course, tried to avoid his acquaintance from the very beginning, and he, too, was bored with me from the first; but I never care how much they shout on the other side of the partition nor how many of them there are in there: I sit up all night and forget them so completely that I do not even hear them. I stay awake till daybreak, and have been going on like that for the last year. I sit up all night in my arm-chair at the table, doing nothing. I only read by day. I sit—don't even think; ideas of a sort wander through my mind and I let them come and go as they will. A whole candle is burnt every night.

I sat down quietly at the table, took out the revolver and put it down before me. When I had put it down I asked myself, I remember, “Is that so?” and answered with complete conviction, “It is.” That is, I shall shoot myself. I knew that I should shoot myself that night for certain, but how much longer I should go on sitting at the table I did not know. And no doubt I should have shot myself if it had not been for that little girl.

Chapter II

You see, though nothing mattered to me, I could feel pain, for instance. If anyone had struck me it would have hurt me. It was the same morally: if anything very pathetic happened, I should have felt pity just as I used to do in the old days when there were things in life that did matter to me. I had felt pity that evening. I should have certainly helped a child. Why, then, had I not helped the little girl? Because of an idea that occurred to me at the time: when she was calling and pulling at me, a question suddenly arose before me and I could not settle it. The question was an idle one, but I was vexed. I was vexed at the reflection that if I were going to make an end of myself that night, nothing in life ought to have mattered to me. Why was it that all at once I did not feel a strange pang, quite incongruous in my position? Really I do not know better how to convey my fleeting sensation at the moment, but the sensation persisted at home when I was sitting at the table, and I was very much irritated as I had not been for a

long time past. One reflection followed another. I saw clearly that so long as I was still a human being and not nothingness, I was alive and so could suffer, be angry and feel shame at my actions. So be it. But if I am going to kill myself, in two hours, say, what is the little girl to me and what have I to do with shame or with anything else in the world? I shall turn into nothing, absolutely nothing. And can it really be true that the consciousness that I shall completely cease to exist immediately, and so everything else will cease to exist, does not in the least affect my feeling of pity for the child nor the feeling of shame after a contemptible action? I stamped and shouted at the unhappy child as though to say not only that I feel no pity, but even if I behave inhumanly and contemptibly, I am free to, for in another two hours everything will be extinguished. Do you believe that that was why I shouted that? I am almost convinced of it now. It seemed clear to me that life and the world somehow depended upon me now. I may almost say that the world now seemed created for me alone: if I shot myself the world would cease to be at least for me. I say nothing of its being likely that nothing will exist for anyone when I am gone, and that as soon as my consciousness is extinguished the whole world will vanish too and become void like a phantom, as a mere appurtenance of my consciousness, for possibly all this world and all these people are only me myself.

I remember that as I sat and reflected, I turned all these new questions that swarmed one after another quite the other way, and thought of something quite new. For instance, a strange reflection suddenly occurred to me, that if I had lived before on the moon or on Mars and there had committed the most disgraceful and dishonorable action and had there been put to such shame and ignominy as one can only conceive and realize in dreams, in nightmares and if, finding myself afterwards on earth, I were able to retain the memory of what I had done on the other planet and at the same time knew that I should never, under any circumstances, return there, then looking from the earth to the moon—should I care or not? Should I feel shame for that action or not? These were idle and superfluous questions for the revolver was already lying before me, and I knew in every fiber of my being that it would happen for certain, but they excited me and I raged. I could not die now without having first settled something. In short, the child had saved me, for I put off my pistol shot for the sake of these questions.

Meanwhile the clamour had begun to subside in the captain's room: they had finished their game, were settling down to sleep, and meanwhile were grumbling and languidly winding up their quarrels. At that point, I suddenly fell asleep in my chair at the table—a thing which had never happened to me before. I dropped asleep quite unawares.

Dreams, as we all know, are very queer things: some parts are presented with appalling vividness, with details worked up with the elaborate finish of jewelery, while others one gallops through, as it were, without noticing them at all, as, for instance, through space and time. Dreams seem to be spurred on not by reason but by desire, not by the head but by the heart, and yet what complicated tricks my reason has played sometimes in dreams, what utterly incomprehensible things happen to it! My brother died five years ago, for instance. I sometimes dream of him; he takes part in my affairs, we are very much interested, and yet all through my dream I quite know and remember that my brother is dead and buried. How is it that I am not surprised that, though he is dead, he is here beside me and working with me? Why is it that my reason fully accepts it? But enough. I will begin about my dream. Yes, I dreamed a dream, my dream of the third of November. They tease me now, telling me it was only a dream. But does it matter whether it was a dream or reality, if the dream made known to me the truth? If once one has recognized the truth and seen it, you know that it is the truth and that there is no

other and there cannot be, whether you are asleep or awake. Let it be a dream, so be it, but that real life of which you make so much I had meant to extinguish by suicide, and my dream, my dream—oh, it revealed to me a different life, renewed, grand and full of power!

Listen.

Chapter III

I have mentioned that I dropped asleep unawares and even seemed to be still reflecting on the same subjects. I suddenly dreamt that I picked up the revolver and aimed it straight at my heart—my heart, and not my head; and I had determined beforehand to fire at my head, at my right temple. After aiming at my chest I waited a second or two, and suddenly my candle, my table, and the wall in front of me began moving and heaving. I made haste to pull the trigger.

In dreams you sometimes fall from a height, or are stabbed, or beaten, but you never feel pain unless, perhaps, you really bruise yourself against the bedstead, then you feel pain and almost always wake up from it. It was the same in my dream. I did not feel any pain, but it seemed as though with my shot everything within me was shaken and everything was suddenly dimmed, and it grew horribly black around me. I seemed to be blinded, and it benumbed, and I was lying on something hard, stretched on my back; I saw nothing, and could not make the slightest movement. People were walking and shouting around me, the captain bawled, the landlady shrieked—and suddenly another break and I was being carried in a closed coffin. And I felt how the coffin was shaking and reflected upon it, and for the first time the idea struck me that I was dead, utterly dead, I knew it and had no doubt of it, I could neither see nor move, and yet I was feeling and reflecting. But I was soon reconciled to the position and, as one usually does in a dream, accepted the facts without disputing them.

And now I was buried in the earth. They all went away, I was left alone, utterly alone. I did not move. Whenever before I had imagined being buried the one sensation I associated with the grave was that of damp and cold. So now I felt that I was very cold, especially the tips of my toes, but I felt nothing else.

I lay still, strange to say I expected nothing, accepting without dispute that a dead man had nothing to expect. But it was damp. I don't know how long a time passed—whether an hour or several days, or many days. But all at once a drop of water fell on my closed left eye, making its way through the coffin lid; it was followed a minute later by a second, then a minute later by a third—and so on, regularly every minute. There was a sudden glow of profound indignation in my heart, and I suddenly felt in it a pang of physical pain. "That's my wound," I thought; "that's the bullet . . ." And drop after drop every minute kept falling on my closed eyelid. And all at once, not with my voice, but with my entire being, I called upon the power that was responsible for all that was happening to me:

"Whoever you may be, if you exist, and if anything more rational than what is happening here is possible, suffer it to be here now. But if you are revenging yourself upon me for my senseless suicide by the hideousness and absurdity of this subsequent existence, then let me tell you that no torture could ever equal the contempt which I shall go on dumbly feeling, though my martyrdom may last a million years!"

I made this appeal and held my peace. There was a full minute of unbroken silence and again another drop fell, but I knew with infinite unshakable certainty that everything would

change immediately. And behold my grave suddenly was rent asunder; that is, I don't know whether it was opened or dug up, but I was caught up by some dark and unknown being and we found ourselves in space. I suddenly regained my sight. It was the dead of night, and never, never had there been such darkness. We were flying through space far away from the earth. I did not question the being who was taking me; I was proud and waited. I assured myself that I was not afraid, and was thrilled with ecstasy at the thought that I was not afraid. I do not know how long we were flying, I cannot imagine; it happened as it always does in dreams when you skip over space and time, and the laws of thought and existence, and only pause upon the points for which the heart yearns. I remember that I suddenly saw in the darkness a star. "Is that Sirius?" I asked impulsively, though I had not meant to ask questions.

"No, that is the star you saw between the clouds when you were coming home," the being who was carrying me replied.

I knew that it had something like a human face. Strange to say, I did not like that being; in fact I felt an intense aversion for it. I had expected complete non-existence, and that was why I had put a bullet through my heart. And here I was in the hands of a creature not human, of course, but yet living, existing. "And so there is life beyond the grave," I thought with the strange frivolity one has in dreams. But in its inmost depth my heart remained unchanged. "And if I have got to exist again," I thought, "and live once more under the control of some irresistible power, I won't be vanquished and humiliated."

"You know that I am afraid of you and you despise me for that," I said suddenly to my companion, unable to refrain from the humiliating remark which implied a confession, and feeling my humiliation stab my heart as with a pin. He did not answer my question, but all at once I felt that he was not even despising me, but was laughing at me and had no compassion for me, and that our journey had an unknown and mysterious object that concerned me only. Fear was growing in my heart. Something was mutely and painfully communicated to me from my silent companion, and permeated my whole being. We were flying through dark, unknown space. I had for some time lost sight of the constellations familiar to my eyes. I knew that there were stars in the heavenly spaces the light of which took thousands or millions of years to reach the earth. Perhaps we were already flying through those spaces. I expected something with a terrible anguish that tortured my heart. And suddenly I was thrilled by a familiar feeling that stirred me to the depths: I suddenly caught sight of our sun! I knew that it could not be our sun, that gave life to our earth, and that we were an infinite distance from our sun, but for some reason I knew in my whole being that it was a sun exactly like ours, a duplicate of it. A sweet, thrilling feeling resounded with ecstasy in my heart: the kindred power of the same light which had given me life stirred an echo in my heart and awakened it, and I had a sensation of life, the old life of the past for the first time since I had been in the grave.

"But if that is the sun, if that is exactly the same as our sun," I cried, "where is the earth?"

And my companion pointed to a star twinkling in the distance with an emerald light. We were flying straight towards it.

"And are such repetitions possible in the universe? Can that be the law of Nature? . . . And if that is an earth there, can it be just the same earth as ours . . . just the same, as poor, as unhappy, but precious and beloved forever, arousing in the most ungrateful of her children the same poignant love for her that we feel for our earth?" I cried out, shaken by irresistible, ecstatic love for the old familiar earth which I had left.

The image of the poor child whom I had repulsed flashed through my mind.

"You shall see it all," answered my companion, and there was a note of sorrow in his voice.

But we were rapidly approaching the planet. It was growing before my eyes; I could already distinguish the ocean, the outline of Europe; and suddenly a feeling of a great and holy jealousy glowed in my heart.

"How can it be repeated and what for? I love and can love only that earth which I have left, stained with my blood, when, in my ingratitude, I quenched my life with a bullet in my heart. But I have never, never ceased to love that earth and, perhaps on the very night I parted from it, I loved it more than ever. Is there suffering upon this new earth? On our earth we can only love with suffering and through suffering. We cannot love otherwise, and we know of no other sort of love. I want suffering in order to love. I long, I thirst, this very instant, to kiss with tears the earth that I have left, and I don't want, I won't accept life on any other!"

But my companion had already left me. I suddenly, quite without noticing how, found myself on this other earth, in the bright light of a sunny day, fair as paradise. I believe I was standing on one of the islands that make up on our globe the Greek archipelago, or on the coast of the mainland facing that archipelago. Oh, everything was exactly as it is with us, only everything seemed to have a festive radiance, the splendor of some great, holy triumph attained at last. The caressing sea, green as emerald, splashed softly upon the shore and kissed it with manifest, almost conscious love. The tall, lovely trees stood in all the glory of their blossom, and their innumerable leaves greeted me, I am certain, with their soft, caressing rustle and seemed to articulate words of love. The grass glowed with bright and fragrant flowers. Birds were flying in flocks in the air, and perched fearlessly on my shoulders and arms and joyfully struck me with their darling, fluttering wings. And at last I saw and knew the people of this happy land. That came to me of themselves, they surrounded me, kissed me. The children of the sun, the children of their sun—oh, how beautiful they were! Never had I seen on our own earth such beauty in mankind. Only perhaps in our children, in their earliest years, one might find some remote faint reflection of this beauty. The eyes of these happy people shone with a clear brightness. Their faces were radiant with the light of reason and fullness of a serenity that comes of perfect understanding, but those faces were gay; in their words and voices there was a note of childlike joy. Oh, from the first moment, from the first glance at them, I understood it all! It was the earth untarnished by the Fall; on it lived people who had not sinned. They lived just in such a paradise as that in which, according to all the legends of mankind, our first parents lived before they sinned; the only difference was that all this earth was the same paradise. These people, laughing joyfully, thronged round me and caressed me; they took me home with them, and each of them tried to reassure me. Oh, they asked me no questions, but they seemed, I fancied, to know everything without asking, and they wanted to make haste to smoothe away the signs of suffering from my face.

Chapter IV

And do you know what? Well, granted that it was only a dream, yet the sensation of the love of those innocent and beautiful people has remained with me forever, and I feel as though their love is still flowing out to me from over there. I have seen them myself, have known them and been convinced; I loved them, I suffered for them afterwards. Oh, I understood

at once even at the time that in many things I could not understand them at all; as an up-to-date Russian progressive and contemptible Petersburger, it struck me as inexplicable that, knowing so much, they had, for instance, no science like ours. But I soon realized that their knowledge was gained and fostered by intuitions different from those of us on earth, and that their aspirations, too, were quite different. They desired nothing and were at peace; they did not aspire to knowledge of life as we aspire to understand it, because their lives were full. But their knowledge was higher and deeper than ours; for our science seeks to explain what life is, aspires to understand it in order to teach others how to love, while they without science knew how to live; and that I understood, but I could not understand their knowledge. They showed me their trees, and I could not understand the intense love with which they looked at them; it was as though they were talking with creatures like themselves. And perhaps I shall not be mistaken if I say that they conversed with them. Yes, they had found their language, and I am convinced that the trees understood them. They looked at all Nature like that—at the animals who lived in peace with them and did not attack them, but loved them, conquered by their love. They pointed to the stars and told me something about them which I could not understand, but I am convinced that they were somehow in touch with the stars, not only in thought, but by some living channel. Oh, these people did not persist in trying to make me understand them, they loved me without that, but I knew that they would never understand me, and so I hardly spoke to them about our earth. I only kissed in their presence the earth on which they lived and mutely worshipped them themselves. And they saw that and let me worship them without being abashed at my adoration, for they themselves loved much. They were not unhappy on my account when at times I kissed their feet with tears, joyfully conscious of the love with which they would respond to mine. At times I asked myself with wonder how it was they were able never to offend a creature like me, and never once to arouse a feeling of jealousy or envy in me? Often I wondered how it could be that, boastful and untruthful as I was, I never talked to them of what I knew—of which, of course, they had no notion—that I was never tempted to do so by a desire to astonish or even to benefit them.

They were as gay and sportive as children. They wandered about their lovely woods and copses, they sang their lovely songs; their fair was light—the fruits of their trees, the honey from their woods, and the milk of the animals who loved them. The work they did for food and raiment was brief and not laborious. They loved and begot children, but I never noticed in them the impulse of that cruel sensuality which overcomes almost every man on this earth, all and each, and is the source of almost every sin of mankind on earth. They rejoiced at the arrival of children as new beings to share their happiness. There was no quarrelling, no jealousy among them, and they did not even know what the words meant. Their children were the children of all, for they all made up one family. There was scarcely any illness among them, though there was death; but their old people died peacefully, as though falling asleep, giving blessings and smiles to those who surrounded them to take their last farewell with bright and lovely smiles. I never saw grief or tears on those occasions, but only love, which reached the point of ecstasy, but a calm ecstasy, made perfect and contemplative. One might think that they were still in contact with the departed after death, and that their earthly union was not cut short by death. They scarcely understood me when I questioned them about immortality, but evidently they were so convinced of it without reasoning that it was not for them a question at all. They had no temples, but they had a real living and uninterrupted sense of oneness with the whole of the universe; they had no creed, but they had a certain knowledge that when their earthly joy had

reached the limits of earthly nature, then there would come for them, for the living and for the dead, a still greater fullness of contact with the whole of the universe. They looked forward to that moment with joy, but without haste, not pining for it, but seeming to have a foretaste of it in their hearts, of which they talked to one another.

In the evening before going to sleep they liked singing in musical and harmonious chorus. In those songs they expressed all the sensations that the parting day had given them, sang its glories and took leave of it. They sang the praises of nature, of the sea, of the woods. They liked making songs about one another, and praised each other like children; they were the simplest songs, but they sprang from their hearts and went to one's heart. And not only in their songs but in all their lives they seemed to do nothing but admire one another. It was like being in love with each other, but an all-embracing, universal feeling. Some of their songs, solemn and rapturous, I scarcely understood at all. Though I understood the words I could never fathom their full significance. It remained, as it were, beyond the grasp of my mind, yet my heart unconsciously absorbed it more and more. I often told them that I had had a presentiment of it long before, that this joy and glory had come to me on our earth in the form of a yearning melancholy that at times approached insufferable sorrow; that I had had a foreknowledge of them all and of their glory in the dreams of my heart and the visions of my mind; that often on our earth I could not look at the setting sun without tears. . . that in my hatred for the men of our earth there was always a yearning anguish: why could I not hate them without loving them? why could I not help forgiving them? and in my love for them there was a yearning grief: why could I not love them without hating them? They listened to me, and I saw they could not conceive what I was saying, but I did not regret that I had spoken to them of it: I knew that they understood the intensity of my yearning anguish over those whom I had left. But when they looked at me with their sweet eyes full of love, when I felt that in their presence my heart, too, became as innocent and just as theirs, the feeling of the fullness of life took my breath away, and I worshipped them in silence.

Oh, everyone laughs in my face now, and assures me that one cannot dream of such details as I am telling now, that I only dreamed or felt one sensation that arose in my heart in delirium and made up the details myself when I woke up. And when I told them that perhaps it really was so, my God, how they shouted with laughter in my face, and what mirth I caused! Oh, yes, of course I was overcome by the mere sensation of my dream, and that was all that was preserved in my cruelly wounded heart; but the actual forms and images of my dream, that is, the very ones I really saw at the very time of my dream, were filled with such harmony, were so lovely and enchanting and were so actual, that on awakening I was, of course, incapable of clothing them in our poor language, so that they were bound to become blurred in my mind; and so perhaps I really was forced afterwards to make up the details, and so of course to distort them in my passionate desire to convey some at least of them as quickly as I could. But on the other hand, how can I help believing that it was all true? It was perhaps a thousand times brighter, happier, and more joyful than I describe it. Granted that I dreamed it, yet it must have been real. You know, I will tell you a secret: perhaps it was not a dream at all! For then something happened so awful, something so horribly true, that it could not have been imagined in a dream. My heart may have originated the dream, but would my heart alone have been capable of originating the awful event which happened to me afterwards? How could I alone have invented it or imagined it in my dream? Could my petty heart and fickle, trivial mind have risen to such a revelation of truth? Oh, judge for yourselves: hitherto I have

concealed it, but now I will tell the truth. The fact is that I . . . corrupted them all!

Chapter V

Yes, yes, it ended in my corrupting them all! How it could come to pass I do not know, but I remember it clearly. The dream embraced thousands of years and left in me only a sense of the whole. I only know that I was the cause of their sin and downfall. Like a vile trichina, like a germ of the plague infecting whole kingdoms, so I contaminated all this earth, so happy and sinless before my coming. They learnt to lie, grew fond of lying, and discovered the charm of falsehood. Oh, at first perhaps it began innocently, with a jest, coquetry, with amorous play, perhaps indeed with a germ, but that germ of falsity made its way into their hearts and pleased them. Then sensuality was soon begotten, sensuality begot jealousy, jealousy—cruelty . . . Oh, I don't know, I don't remember; but soon, very soon the first blood was shed. They marvelled and were horrified, and began to be split up and divided. They formed into unions, but it was against one another. Reproaches, upbraidings followed. They came to know shame, and shame brought them to virtue. The conception of honor sprang up, and every union began waving its flags. They began torturing animals, and the animals withdrew from them into the forests and became hostile to them. They began to struggle for separation, for isolation, for individuality, for mine and thine. They began to talk in different languages. They became acquainted with sorrow and loved sorrow; they thirsted for suffering, and said that truth could only be attained through suffering. Then science appeared. As they became wicked they began talking of brotherhood and humanitarianism, and understood those ideas. As they became criminal, they invented justice and drew up whole legal codes in order to observe it, and to ensure their being kept, set up a guillotine. They hardly remembered what they had lost, in fact refused to believe that they had ever been happy and innocent. They even laughed at the possibility of this happiness in the past, and called it a dream. They could not even imagine it in definite form and shape but, strange and wonderful to relate, though they lost all faith in their past happiness and called it a legend, they so longed to be happy and innocent once more that they succumbed to this desire like children, made an idol of it, set up temples and worshipped their own idea, their own desire; though at the same time they fully believed that it was unattainable and could not be realized, yet they bowed down to it and adored it with tears! Nevertheless, if it could have happened that they had returned to the innocent and happy condition which they had lost, and if someone had shown it to them again and had asked them whether they wanted to go back to it, they would certainly have refused. They answered me: "We may be deceitful, wicked and unjust, we know it and weep over it, we grieve over it; we torment and punish ourselves more perhaps than that merciful Judge Who will judge us and whose Name we know not. But we have science, and by the means of it we shall find the truth and we shall arrive at it consciously. Knowledge is higher than feeling, the consciousness of life is higher than life. Science will give us wisdom, wisdom will reveal the laws, and the knowledge of the laws of happiness is higher than happiness." That is what they said, and after saying such things everyone began to love himself better than anyone else, and indeed they could not do otherwise. All became so jealous of the rights of their own personality that they did their very utmost to curtail and destroy them in others, and made that the chief thing in their lives. Slavery followed, even voluntary slavery; the weak eagerly submitted to the strong, on condition that the latter aided them to subdue the still weaker. Then there were saints who

came to these people, weeping, and talked to them of their pride, of their loss of harmony and due proportion, of their loss of shame. They were laughed at or pelted with stones. Holy blood was shed on the threshold of the temples. Then there arose men who began to think how to bring all people together again, so that everybody, while still loving himself best of all, might not interfere with others, and all might live together in something like a harmonious society. Regular wars sprang up over this idea. All the combatants at the same time firmly believed that science, wisdom, and the instinct of self-preservation would force men at last to unite into a harmonious and rational society; and so, meanwhile, to hasten matters, “the wise” endeavored to exterminate as rapidly as possible all who were “not wise” and did not understand their idea, that the latter might not hinder its triumph. But the instinct of self-preservation grew rapidly weaker; there arose men, haughty and sensual, who demanded all or nothing. In order to obtain everything they resorted to crime, and if they did not succeed—to suicide. There arose religions with a cult of non-existence and self-destruction for the sake of the everlasting peace of annihilation. At last these people grew weary of their meaningless toil, and signs of suffering came into their faces, and then they proclaimed that suffering was a beauty, for in suffering alone was there meaning. They glorified suffering in their songs. I moved about among them, wringing my hands and weeping over them, but I loved them perhaps more than in old days when there was no suffering in their faces and when they were innocent and so lovely. I loved the earth they had polluted even more than when it had been a paradise, if only because sorrow had come to it. Alas! I always loved sorrow and tribulation, but only for myself, for myself; but I wept over them, pitying them. I stretched out my hands to them in despair, blaming, cursing, and despising myself. I told them that all this was my doing, mine alone; that it was I who had brought them corruption, contamination, and falsity. I besought them to crucify me, I taught them how to make a cross. I could not kill myself, I had not the strength, but I wanted to suffer at their hands. I yearned for suffering, I longed that my blood should be drained to the last drop in these agonies. But they only laughed at me, and began at last to look upon me as crazy. They justified me, they declared that they had only got what they wanted themselves, and that all that now was could not have been otherwise. At last they declared to me that I was becoming dangerous and that they should lock me up in a madhouse if I did not hold my tongue. Then such grief took possession of my soul that my heart was wrung, and I felt as though I were dying; and then . . . then I awoke.

It was morning, that is, it was not yet daylight, but about six o’clock. I woke up in the same arm-chair; my candle had burnt out; everyone was asleep in the captain’s room, and there was a stillness all round, rare in our flat. First of all I leapt up in great amazement: nothing like this had ever happened to me before, not even in the most trivial detail; I had never, for instance, fallen asleep like this in my arm-chair. While I was standing and coming to myself I suddenly caught sight of my revolver lying loaded, ready—but instantly I thrust it away! Oh, now, life, life! I lifted up my hands and called upon eternal truth, not with words, but with tears; ecstasy, immeasurable ecstasy flooded my soul. Yes, life and spreading the good tidings! Oh, I at that moment resolved to spread the tidings, and resolved it, of course, for my whole life. I go to spread the tidings, I want to spread the tidings—of what? Of the truth, for I have seen it, have seen it with my own eyes, have seen it in all its glory.

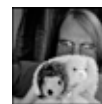
And since then I have been preaching! Moreover I love all those who laugh at me more than any of the rest. Why that is so I do not know and cannot explain, but so be it. I am told that I am vague and confused, and if I am vague and confused now, what shall I be later on? It

is true indeed: I am vague and confused, and perhaps as time goes on I shall be more so. And of course I shall make many blunders before I find out how to preach—that is, find out what words to say, what things to do, for it is a very difficult task. I see all that as clear as daylight but, listen, who does not make mistakes? And yet, you know, all are making for the same goal, all are striving in the same direction anyway, from the sage to the lowest robber, only by different roads. It is an old truth, but this is what is new: I cannot go far wrong. For I have seen the truth; I have seen and I know that people can be beautiful and happy without losing the power of living on earth. I will not and cannot believe that evil is the normal condition of mankind. And it is just this faith of mine that they laugh at. But how can I help believing it? I have seen the truth—it is not as though I had invented it with my mind, I have seen it, seen it, and the living image of it has filled my soul forever. I have seen it in such full perfection that I cannot believe that it is impossible for people to have it. And so how can I go wrong? I shall make some slips no doubt, and shall perhaps talk in second-hand language, but not for long: the living image of what I saw will always be with me and will always correct and guide me. Oh, I am full of courage and freshness, and I will go on and on if it were for a thousand years! Do you know, at first I meant to conceal the fact that I corrupted them, but that was a mistake—that was my first mistake! But truth whispered to me that I was lying, and preserved me and corrected me. But how establish paradise—I don't know, because I do not know how to put it into words. After my dream I lost command of words. All the chief words, anyway, the most necessary ones. But never mind, I shall go and I shall keep talking, I won't leave off, for anyway I have seen it with my own eyes, though I cannot describe what I saw. But the scoffers do not understand that. It was a dream, they say, delirium, hallucination. Oh! As though that meant so much! And they are so proud! A dream! What is a dream? And is not our life a dream? I will say more. Suppose that this paradise will never come to pass (that I understand), yet I shall go on preaching it. And yet how simple it is: in one day, in one hour everything could be arranged at once! The chief thing is to love others like yourself, that's the chief thing, and that's everything; nothing else is wanted—you will find out at once how to arrange it all. And yet it's an old truth which has been told and retold a billion times—but it has not formed part of our lives! The consciousness of life is higher than life, the knowledge of the laws of happiness is higher than happiness—that is what one must contend against. And I shall. If only everyone wants it, it can be arranged at once.

And I tracked down that little girl . . . and I shall go on and on!

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Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from the Northwest

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), and resumed after a long absence in issue 59 (October 2006). It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Written for All Times and All Places (1/3/2009)

Rocket ships to the moon. Mapping the very DNA of life. Still this blood. Still leaders cry out for it, and the people respond with lusty yes & yes & yes. Til we no longer divide ourselves into tribes and deem the earth no more than a human battlefield, the war goes on. One year, one place. Another year, another. The following my response to today's news, and how it echoes and echoes and echoes, from antiquity to now to centuries unimaginable hence. Unless . . .

The day's news headlines told of one nation invading another, & a general's boast of how many targets awaited, we will crush you, crush you, the firepower we bear is goodly, Godly, each explosion speaks our blood vengeance for every dark memory, every wife & child we've lost to you, every home & marketplace, we will crush you & more, you will never harm us again, our God-possessed weapons will annihilate your bodies & your very souls, your way of life, plots & plans, what you believe, what you love, what you hold waits beyond this world, feel this anger that our countless generations have cumed, the cries of our rent mothers & fallen kings, & baby-faced soldiers with their limbs & guts gone, feel it, feel *us*, each of us, as we crush you, destroy your crops & your roads & your bridges as you have destroyed ours, but you did so with a false god, thus a false premise to your idea of who would vanquish whom, for you see you are the evil we speak of in our sacred stories, you are the other, the terror beyond hills & woods & dunes, what we train our children to loathe, to fear, to cry out in full-throated triumph as it is destroyed. Your soldiers, your women, your old men & women. Your kings & presidents. Your artwork & sacred books. Your calm scenery & Sunday outings. You cannot live that we may. We may, we *must*. *We will*. You are whom we vanquish, & how our God will praise us & bless us with eternal prosperity, with fruitful lands & newly married wombs. Our preachers gesture us toward these hoped-for days, a month & a year & a century after we have destroyed you, & others like you in this world about us, & others to come in other times. Peace will come fully & finally when you are each & every & all dead & we the blessed, we the people of the true God have no more fears to worry about when we walk our children in the park, pray in our houses of worship, gather for trade in our marketplaces. Ever & ever. All of you must die. Our true God allows us no other option even as your false god says the same. Blood speaks one truth. Our God speaks one truth. Paradise builds from your graveyard.

From Letter to Ralph H. Emerson (2/16/2009)

“Both the obstacle to and the locus of freedom, for Artaud, lie in the body. His attitude covers the familiar Gnostic thematic range: the affirmation of the body, the revulsion from the body, the wish to transcend the body, the quest for the redeemed body. ‘Nothing touches me, nothing interests me,’ he writes, ‘except what addresses itself directly to my flesh.’ But the body is always the problem. Artaud never defines the body in terms of its capacity for sensuous pleasure but always in terms of its electric capacity for intelligence and for pain.”
—Susan Sontag, “Approaching Artaud,” 1973.

Antonin Artaud appeared to struggle mightily over the mind-body dichotomy. I think everyone does. Being a committed, passionate artist, he took it deep into his heart & tried to use Art to express his struggle & resolve it. It seems he did not succeed, though it's perhaps too simplistic to make any conclusion.

I differ with him in that I do not start with the Gnostic dichotomy of mind vs. body. Not because I know better than Artaud or the Gnostics but more because I see no point in it. In this world, whatever it may be, each of us inhabits one body for a finite period of growth & decay, until death. Of course there are human traditions that preach about pre-existence & afterlife, of reincarnation & so on but, honestly, none convince me, or each other, that any are true. It's devilishly hard for a human being to say: “I don't know”—we are driven to *know*, it seems—but, that acknowledged, we do not know. Belief & faith are *not* knowing. I'm not sure if science is even knowing.

So I differ with Artaud without saying he's wrong or I'm right. I've got this idea that maybe the best thing to do is tend toward beliefs, toward “truths” & “facts” that draw you. There are so many, & any could be right, or many, all or none. Or some of the time. Or just once. The world blares through us unceasing & yet we do not know. Can we know, all or any of us? Maybe. And yes. Or no. No wonder some end up in institutions, others on the street, others with crowns on their heads, others feeding, breeding, shitting, & dying. The world seems to be both its own problem & its own solution. A = A.

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President Obama's Address Tonight (2/24/2009)

President Obama spoke for an hour to Congress tonight, acknowledging the bad times & the long path ahead, & calling for investments in energy, education, & healthcare—“snap” polls show that people reacted as I did—they're in, with him, believe his leadership is the best hope we have—nothing Republicans say matters, their wild cries of NO! impress nobody—and continue to impress nobody—it's amazing they stick it out together—no ideas, no following—repudiated in every way imaginable—with no prospects any time soon—they try to speak the language bullies speak—do as we say & don't be fooled by anyone else's promises of hope through hard work & union—*or else.* I keep wondering when more Republicans than just a few governors will wave the others goodbye & leave them behind—some people refuse to learn, to allow for change & growth through admitting that someone else is right—taking that humbling, cleansing step. It may take more than one election but I see their disintegration as

more possible than ever—into a party of fiscal conservatives & another of religious fanatics—of course the Democrats could break into centrists & progressives—Obama may be the last great Democratic president even as Reagan was the last great Republican president.

Obama believes the government must get the nation's credit system—the “nation's lifeblood”—going again, & reform financial regulations. To press into the future, he stresses education, healthcare, & green energy. His ideas are both progressive & populist. Help all boats rise, & trust those in the boats will ensure the nation's future. It's a trust between the government & those governed. A positive, hopeful perspective. On foreign policy, renewed investment in diplomacy & economic collaboration.

He sees the world as one where bad things can & do happen, stupidity, avarice, prejudice, but also one where the basic tenets of kindness, neighborliness, patriotism, family, faith can be summoned in the worst times—and the transformative power of hope can remake the world.

I believe not only in his specific ideas but I agree with his philosophy. And I like that he anticipates, welcomes debate & difference of opinion. For those who thought he couldn't get made into law his \$700+ billion stimulus plan, he has a new message: I've only just begun my work as President.

I listened hungrily to this strong, fiercely intelligent man's words tonight. Listened, knowing he means every word, that he fears the opposition of no person, & welcomes the ideas of all, if they are spoken from an honest heart, not an ideological nest occupying that same space. Listened, nodded, clapped, willing anew to embrace President Obama not as savior or superhero but as precisely what a leader should be, especially in times of crisis: one who gestures powerfully toward better days & warns of the pitfalls of weakness along the path—and, finally, hands out the tools to get there to every willing set of hands, of course taking a set for himself.

* * * * *

From Letter to Jim Burke III (3/2/2009)

I don't find the accumulation of years to bring answers, or even fewer questions. If anything, the answers more & more turn to water while the questions turn to stone. I look with increasing hostility toward those who claim to big answers too. Especially simple answers, one-word answers. Jesus. Love. Money. Etc. Even my old personal standby, Art, is, I realize, insufficient. That is to say, neither nothing nor everything.

There is an attraction many people feel toward believing that the times they live in are unique, unprecedented, full of new possibilities. Worse, I suppose, would be to believe that you missed the golden age, or will die before it comes. Less than ever do I believe any age, past or to come, has or will constitute such an age. At best, there is better and worse.

Having lived awake since the 1970s, I'd say there are good things to be said for now. Obama being elected was a good thing, if only to balance out with hope the increasingly hopeless recent years. Economically, times are terrible, but, again, there is a sense of change & hope. Hope is a good thing, a powerful thing.

I try to look about the world & think an objective thought, not one so driven by my personal history & tastes that it is fairly useless except to myself. This is hard, maybe impossible,

in a way. The times seem so driven by anecdotal, subjective assertions dressed up as “truth.” Was it ever otherwise? I really wonder.

* * *

If I have nothing else to say here, of any point, it’s this: human kindness does not surprise me so much as human cruelty. Virtually every form of prejudice & war & partisan battle is not sourced in physical imperatives of survival or in *ideas*—rather than using our consciousness, our will, to create a world good & generous to all, we have created a despicable place of conflict, greed, suffering, needless pain & sadness. It is *kindness* that shocks, not *cruelty*.

Our world is stratified in so many ways—by class, country, ethnicity, gender, religion & so on—that we’ve lost awareness that these distinctions are *choices*, not natural facts. In other words, in this country as an example, one century African persons are slaves, are *owned*; in a later century, one of this populace is elected leader of all. Yet both centuries call their passing choices facts, crown such transient ways with the word “truth.”

Cultural hypnosis. Not unique to this moment, this place. And yet.

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Comment on Joblessness & Obama’s America (3/10/2009)

I don’t know how long my unemployment will last this time around, I can only figure best ground to work from, & a process, a working process, that will evolve over time—doing both gives me structure for my hard, daylight hours—getting through those with least damage is crucial—been through this shit over & over in Bush’s America—Obama’s America will eventually be different, better—it recognizes suffering in America, in the world, & acknowledges its own function to help, to get people from their worst hours & trust most want to eventually sail by their own steam—Obama’s America gestures toward better days & plans the path & wills to include all. Obama’s America does not forget the weakest & most vulnerable, nor does it confuse one’s present low station with one’s potential. Obama’s America, where children still cry & the lonely still suffer, nonetheless argues that the worst of life is nobody’s only option or compelled choice. Obama’s America believes in the dignity of the human being, the sacredness of the world, the hope in every new day & turn in the road. How far Obama’s America, or the world at large, goes, however, is up to each of us.

* * * * *



Justice for Healing: Repudiating Torture in America (4/25/2009)

“We need to do this for the sake of our future. For this isn’t about looking backward, it’s about looking forward—because it’s about reclaiming America’s soul.”

—Paul Krugman, *New York Times*, 4/24/2009

To shift back from eight years way, way out of power to holding again the reins of governance has, to some degree, befuddled we in the progressive movement. After all, there was no agreement as to how to oppose Bush—nothing more concrete than end his war & jail him, his Cabinet, & Cheney. None of that happened. All left office unhandcuffed; some of these criminals even now natter away on TV as though they have any wisdom or advice to offer anyone.

Obama is not everyone’s dream leader yet all but a strange cluster of right wing & conspiracy theory nuts will agree he is so much better than Bush, & that he is slowly restoring the rule of law & practice of both civility at home & diplomacy abroad. Glad to have him, some grudgingly, some thrillingly. Polls show him riding at least 66% approval where his predecessor couldn’t get half of that his last several years in office.

Arguments run full gamut over his economic recovery plans yet most agree that green energy investment & healthcare reform are necessary, will happen, & will likely benefit all. And few but the chronically dissatisfied will dispute that exchanging diplomatic gestures with Iran, Cuba, & Chile (Chavez) isn’t a good thing. Traditionally, Americans like to negotiate & presume the lead chair for themselves at the table. Big Daddy to the world.

What President Obama does not have, which bothers many, is a prosecutorial bent toward his predecessor’s breaches of the law. What I think he is not yet getting is how deep the anger lives for what George W. Bush & his criminal cabal did to the world. From the stolen election of 2000, to the mysteries of 9/11 & the bizarre pursuit of Iraq as prime enemy, to the Orwellian spying structure he erected at home, & a litany of other abuses of power, liberty, decency, & common sense, many of us feel personally wounded, hit hard & low, & often when we see or read the brazen commentaries of Cheney, Rove, Rice.

We ask: why aren’t these people & their foremost assistants not in jail? They tortured people as part of building a case to invade Iraq, went in while millions around the world protested, & destroyed the country once there. They spied on Americans, tapped their phones, read their emails, eroded their civil liberties over & over again for eight fucking years.

* * *

President Obama, we have been abused, savagely harmed by these people, & what can one say about their attorneys who sanctioned physical torture of prisoners? We are glad, literally millions of us are glad, that you are in office. We put you there. But no, we’re not ready for forgive & forget. Who among Bush’s criminals has asked for forgiveness? Who among them has admitted to committing a single brazen wrong?

We are angry and we are unappeased. Millions of us have lost our jobs, our homes, our simple trust in each other & in the belief that this country tries to do the right thing.

It’s difficult to tell you this. You’re trying to save us from an economic depression, from even worse times. You’re trying to re-open channels to the world of nations, undo countless

damages. You believe a widespread prosecution of Bush criminals for war crimes would divide & divert the country.

In truth, I believed this for awhile, believed your position was unfortunately the best.

Now, I wonder. I wonder about what is not being done now, & what wounds will not properly heal. I wonder if the new world you envision can honestly be built on such bloody soil as exists now in the collective American psyche. I wonder not at your brilliant mind, your caring soul, your capable managerial hands. I wonder if you are simply not brave enough to risk so much for your nation, your world. What I suspect is that you are taking a gamble that the wounds will heal with the better days you are working so hard to bring about. More jobs, better healthcare, a more wise stewardship of the earth.

What I worry you miss is that the human heart is a mystery & never forgets, not only the depths of the pain but the qualities of the healing. There are subtler & grosser ways to recover from an ill. Pills, crutches. Rest, good food. Empathy. Assurances that it will not happen again because those who caused it have been brought to the bar & been made to account, or confess. Admit wrong.

What we're lacking, what we need, is a sense of justice. You are a better man than George W. Bush & his criminals & you have brought us better days already simply by not being him, & by reversing many of his policies & strategies.

What you have not yet done is to wield the full power of the American government to try and, if guilty, punish him & his colleagues. Repudiate finally & fully the bastards who violated the trust we give elected officials when we vote them into office & empower them to govern in our best interest.

Until this happens, President Obama, there will be a soft spot in your high mantle. A feeling that you would do almost anything to uphold & defend the Constitution. A slight lack of heart that will linger as a strange aroma near the beautiful garden you are inviting us all to build up together with you.

You have asked us to be patient, to act with courage, to join together in conjuring by will & sweat these great new days. I am asking you, President Obama, to once & for all let your voice speak clearly & your actions authoritatively to what we are feeling, what you must be feeling too. Even if Bush & Cheney & Rove & the rest never spend a well-earned minute behind bars, speak to how they violated us & how behind your hard, cool pursuit of returning the nation to one of laws, not men, there is a passionate man who was hurt too by these past years, who lets us know clearly, by word & deed, that these men & women are a blight, & their unrepentance clouds over them as clearly to your eye as it does to so many of ours.

Healing is a difficult process. The alternative is worse.



Judih Haggai**Under Fire**

fire takes many forms
it comes to an open heart
it grabs an unsuspecting ankle
it throws you down the stairs
it lies and accuses a disbelieving mind
it purrs like a kitten
and bites like a scorpion
under fire looks like a sweet bowl of pudding
and sinks like quicksand
it comes in words and dynamite
it comes with shrapnel and diatribe
under fire
getting used to living
under fire



Judih Haggai

Is Winning What It's All About?

winners rue the day they won
downhill from there
new challenges take on obsessive gut-go
gotta win, gotta do it again
go, go, lord, go
chasms burst out of flatlands
evil knievel jumps the abyss
slips and falls
down into the tar pits
winner, winner, oh, winner goes
one last stand, oh custer
is slaughtering what it's crocked up to be?
how many scalps make a warrior proud
winner, winning
more, higher, step it up
is it all what they think it is?
up there, on mt. olympus
do they truly hand out laurel leaves
golden boughs of platinum apples
is immortality the thing we want?
winning, mountain climbing leader
planting the flag of human frailty
a prayer flag beset by gravity
how serious the moment
the win, the prize
how serious?
who's serious?
it's an elusive illusion
can't fool me



Judih Haggai

Jammin' Spring

made it, sliding into home
sweet narcissus opening her bloom for all
you deserve it, she sighs
loopy birds drunk on fragrance
warbling their little ditties
harmonica on low
sweet willows inviting company

spring matilda rock concert
let the kangaroo jive



Judih Haggai

Candle Alert

I see candles in my future
lots of brave little emissaries
scouting on ahead
marking the path
proving there's a future



G.C. Dillon



One Bullet

[New Fiction]

You check the clip for the third or fourth time that day. Empty. You slam it back into the Navy issue .45. The last bullet rests in the chamber, waits for the squeeze of your finger upon the trigger. You are saving the last round for yourself. It's not that you want to die, you tell yourself, it's just you have nothing to live for. At least here.

You remember. Remember how you got here, remember your last flight. Your patrol of torpedo bombers got lost, nothing looked right from the air. The landmarks were all wrong. Just wrong. Was there panic? Fly East. We should fly West. You can't determine West. The compasses are out, useless. The planes' are missing their clocks to time your course changes. Set the Sun to your port wing and you will reach home, you were told. One of the radios was out, too. It was your radio. The flight leader wouldn't change to emergency frequencies for fear of losing you, your plane, your crew. Was it your fault the patrol never made contact with the necessary radio towers? No, you tell yourself. Yes! The squadron ditched when the first plane's fuel tanks went below 10 gallons. You are the only survivor. One out of fourteen airmen. You washed up on the small island you flew over earlier that day. One of the wrong landmarks. Bimini? Or someplace else? Even someplace alien.

You must still be in the Florida Keys – or so you tell yourself, though you know it cannot be true. The sky is more a maroon color than blue, and the ocean is greenish. The Sun doesn't set in the West according to your compass anymore. Perhaps that is why you set the device into your bamboo hut's door. It is only good for a doorknob now. Here, wherever here may be. Some other planet or realm of reality. You could be in Efland or circling Alpha Centauri for all you know. *But you must still be in the Keys*, you tell yourself, *if you are to ever be rescued*.

You could not have complained about your posting in Florida. Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale is warm. Your buddy Billy is stationed in occupied Germany. He went Army. It is so cold and icy there that a tank slid sideways down a steep hill. It crashed into a hofbrau. Your friend was the M.P. sent to the scene. He reported the driver popped the lid, lifted his index finger, and said, "*Bier, bitte*." What else could he do? Billy wrote. The name of the hamlet was edited out by the military censors.

You miss Billy, your crew, even your Commanding Officer. You wonder why it is not your family that you miss the most. If your dreams are any indication, it is chili dogs from **Joe's Flamingo Bar & Grill**, and the dark-eyed Erica who serves them. You always wake up here. Here where you forage for food, victuals you never could have imagined eating, some which made you sick and some that just plain tasted horrendously. But you do what you must to survive. You did your best to follow the survival training. Even eating ants—good source of protein. The flora and fauna didn't conform to any training film. Especially that creature. It is hanging around your camp. It looks dangerous.

You are foraging for food when it comes upon you. You've seen it before. It only stands where shadows lie, but you have a good glimpse today. It has the head of a lion, the body of a billy-goat, and the long scaly tail of a snake. That's a *chimera*, you would tell yourself if you remember your Edith Hamilton well enough. You've seen it circle your hut, seen it stalk you. You have nicknamed it the name of a lion from stories you read before being marooned. You call it *Amra* from a made up language of stories you read as a kid in *Weird Tales*. It was that or *Aslan*. The creature steps into the glen, steps toward you. Its vermilion eyes lock onto yours.

It is one reason that you saved that one bullet. One bullet for you. It will not have you, you vow. Not have you *alive*, you really mean. You reach into your pocket for your good luck charm. Is its presence the reason you are still alive? It is the dog whistle you had for your mutt back home in Kansas. You only used it once. Your dog twisted its head, its ears up, and its brown eyes displaying what you thought was pain. You never used it again. Till now. Will it cause this creature the same pain or discomfort? You blow the whistle with every breath in your twin lungs. Its head twists just the same.

You must make it back to your camp, your hut with its compass for a doorknob.

You run. You run and you run.

It—the *chimera* chases. You run harder, your lungs flapping like butterfly's wings. And suddenly it pounces into your path. Flames fly out of its nostrils. Puffs of smoke float in the air like low hanging clouds.

The pistol is still in your hand. You check the clip one last time. One round only. You need to spend it now. One bullet, one shot, one chance. But which direction does the barrel point. Which of you will eat the bullet?

The *chimera* pounces. Your shot goes off. The creature bounds into you, knocking you to the ground. Its weight makes it hard to breathe. But your bullet is lodged in its brain. A bloody hole in its eye-socket drips on you. You took your chance, made your choice, spent your last shell.

I'll not die today! you say, you swear, you make a new vow. You toss away the spent handgun and unsheath your survival knife. You wonder, if only for a moment, if they hunt in packs.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Secret Joy Amongst These Times: The History of Scriptor Press, 1995 to the Present

*“Think for yourself
& question authority.”*
—Dr. Timothy Leary

Chapter Fourteen

continued from

The Cenacle | 63 | December 2007

My deepest sense of home has long centered within my notebooks & pens. When I was young, barely a teenager, & I knew little of the world, & had travelled nowhere, & there were but books & a few channels on the TV for learning, & for the most part equally unworldly people around me, I lived happily in central Connecticut. I don't know how much knowledge is even necessary so young. A child more wants for stability & love, a sense that the strange world around him or her has some sureness. Eventually, one's curiosity about how & why will breach the limits of family & friends, the local playground & regional teachings & presumptions. One will start to ask questions which can only be answered, if indeed they are answered at all, by venturing out into the world, leaving the familiar but as touchstone. I believe that many people get only so far in creating a new path before turning back, because they are hindered by obstacles & frustrations. Many of us grow sedimented into a place, a way of thinking. I've struggled against this & do so still.

My physical sense of home dissipated in those adolescent & young adult years as I moved several times & began to look outward. My certainty, my grounding became more focussed on people—on the deep feelings (familial, fraternal, romantic) I had for others, & some in turn had for me. Eventually, this dissipated too—although not as much—as people, like places, came & went, or simply changed over time. The world ever shifts in large & little steps.

In truth, even my relationship to my pens & notebooks has changed over the years. My life, its relationships & obligations, has gotten more complex. I'd like to think of this in terms of evolution but it's not all so. I'd like to think that my Art is less discontinuous than my relationships with people or places, fewer spots in the path where a bridge is simply gone or a stretch annihilated. I choose to think that, to believe that I am still honoring the boy I was in 1975, aged 10, living in Bloomfield, Connecticut, writing in his new journal, beginning to create, however, derivatively, his own myths.

Versions of such myths remained with me in 2007 as I continued projects whose roots lay in those days. Also true was that I was still moving from place to place, this year from

Seattle, Washington to Portland, Oregon. What perhaps connected these was that I now had a partner in these shifts, my wife Kassi, with whom I moved, & also with whom I had some of the old certainties I'd long ago felt toward people. The minutiae of this year is easier to study within the context of this framework: Art, places, people. I've learned, to sum this, that they are all important & have profound affect no matter how much I consciously choose to value each at a given time. In other words, they matter, whether I like it or not.

So I began the year in Seattle, working at GE Healthcare, married to Kassi, all had been steady facts since at least December of 2005. What began to undercut this stability was GEHC's rejection of my request to perform my job remotely from home, as did the rest of my team. Looking back now on this job, I can see that I was working in a dysfunctional environment with no support for doing my job well, much less learning how to do it better. As the year went on, it got worse. I was able come summer to extricate myself from it, & find a similar job with Symantec Corporation, one with more support & permission to work remotely, which allowed Kassi & I to move down to Portland, Oregon.

I'd lived in Portland back in the fall & winter of 2002-2003, & left there with no money in my pocket & a broken heart to boot. Returning had been a long-time wish & Kassi had, by our occasional visits there, decided she liked the idea too. We'd tired of Seattle's size, its expense, the tininess of our apartment. It was time to go somewhere different, if not new for both of us.

Another major theme for me in 2007 was working to support the increasing—both in size & effectiveness—political progressive movement in the U.S. In November 2006, millions of us had won both Congressional houses back from George W. Bush. We thought this would help bring about an end to the U.S. occupation in Iraq. In truth, what it did was stall Bush's intention to invade Iran. I suppose one should not discount this though at the time it was extraordinarily frustrating. 2007 was rife with so many Bush administration scandals (the firing of attorneys general for political reasons; the neglectful treatment of returned Iraqi war veterans; government wiretapping of private American citizens) that governance pretty much ground to a halt. The 2008 elections seemed forever & further away.

And a note about health: I began 2007 with one of my feet in a rehabilitative boot due to a slow-healing injury. Short & long of it is that while my health remained good, it needed more conscious effort to stay so. I comment on this to urge people to turn that corner sooner than later. Diet, exercise, mental health: they all matter, they are all fragile, so much of what is good & enjoyable in life can be lost when they are let to erode. Good habits can be formed, can be made to last, will have their effect. Bad habits too. Don't let it become too late. What drove

me primarily was all the Art I have yet to do & the many more years I wish to spend with Kassi. Let what is dearest to you inspire you too.

All of these things coalesced in February into something I called the "Big Push." But I had to finish something first: the delayed *Cenacle* | 60 | December 2006.

This issue appeared finally in February 2007. It features five contributors as well as two reprinted pieces. All of the graphic art work is by Kassi & myself. The other contributors—Jim Burke III, Ric Amante, Judih Haggai—were all long-time friends, each of whom had been featured many times in *The Cenacle's* pages.



So it was a close family issue, the words & thoughts of trusted familiars. Places, too, as the cover is a design based on photos of a “Rooms 75¢” sign in downtown Seattle. The epigraph & back cover bear John Lennon’s statements about peace (“all we are saying is give peace a chance” & “war is over if you want it”), relevant to the current times—surely he would have been in the middle of the anti-war movement anew had he been living now.

The idea of Art among familiars continues in “From Soulard’s Notebooks,” which contains a letter from myself to Judih Haggai. A meditation on Art & faith:

One guesses. One uses experience, & instinct, & the luck available, & guesses. Right can come down to a bowl, a bed, a warm companion near, a purpose, some sense of hope. One guesses among these things, sums what is & guesses toward what will be. Maybe no more. I’m not convinced, if ever I was, that an answer ever comes. This does not mean I lack a sense of wonder, or simply doubt all I see. Contrary, because I do not know, I wonder all the more. My wish leads me onward, by my pen. It’s what I cherish & trust, through these unexplained years.

I’ve developed this “From Soulard’s Notebooks” frontispiece over the years into a kind of letter from the editor, even as it is not always directly to the periodical’s general reader. The reader is sometimes invited as a third party to regard my thoughts directed toward a specific individual.

The first piece in the contents, this time a letter from Jim Burke III to me (partly responding to a letter to him I’d published in *Cenacle* | 59 | October 2006, just to complexify things!), picks up on the uncertainties of navigating life’s changing waters & tides. He writes:

I also agree that nobody knows. As the man said (and yourself), facts do not always reveal the truth. This is because facts are based on physical parameters, and these parameters can be constantly altered to suit the desired outcome. Truth predisposes, a priori, that facts are immaterial, inconsequential, & irrelevant. Nobody knows what the truth is, but I do know what the truth is not! The truth is not living in a country where one has to contrive political games to justify an outcome contrary to the whole soul of the population. Bush tried to do this and, as in such cases of all despots, utterly failed.

The issue continues my *New Songs (for Cassandra)*. I look through the several dozens of these poems, all part of this series I wrote in 2005, now becoming years ago, & one poem stands best for all:

Combust

*Life sheers you mysterious,
leaves what left with a question:
what will you do now?*

The challenge is dual, as I see it now: to find one’s voice to create one’s own poetry, & then to keep re-creating that voice as the years pass along.

Ric Amante’s new poems are fine & clean & challenging as ever; I never tire of nor

doubt his poetic voice. In a poem called “Eight At the Bar,” a group of drinkers ponder what age each would choose to be if any were possible. The narrator’s answer surprises him; not the “fifty plus years . . . what and why and where they should be” but instead suddenly:

*I was 8 again—staring down the kaleidoscopic
funnels of the Merrimack River, surging with the
orange and green dyes from the Essex Mills
as they swirled in tight whirlpools
through my best and freshest mind*

He nails the moment, the revelation, for himself, but I think for many others too.

After the issue’s chapter of this history comes the poetry of Judih Haggai. Her work has long been part of *The Cenacle*’s contents, & always my pride & pleasure to publish. In *Cenacle* 60 two of her poems stand out to me in review. The first, “Field Emerges,” a short one:

*Birds fly low
mechanical scarecrow
grinds metallic blues*

*A field emerges
in gold-streaked wind
rising towards the sun*

The other, “wind swept insights,” particularly its fourth & last stanza:

*my pulse is my music
i sing only this
my voice clamours skywards
alight the wings of an encouraging beat*

Living in the often war-torn nation of Israel, its soil centuries-deep in the blood of carnage-wreaking religious devotees, many of whom raise their eyes to the skies, Jude does so in the name of music, love, yearning. She writes in a faith as potent as the gunfire she hears, the kind not pursued by moving maps with brutality.

There is a passage in Part Three of my *Things Change (Six Thresholds)* where I write:

*♣ to keep pushing, yes, by savage ♣ twist, by fool ♣
whatever falls inkly ‘pon the page, push it on, out,
in, further, one day I et some mushrooms ♣ fell slowly
dark, the next I raised up ♣ said liberation ♣ danger,
creatures of the mind too tall to be tamed ♣ surrounded
for long, creatures of flame ♣ wave, creatures that rose
♣ revel best by night, yes, to keep pushing, a hoary,
bitch sheet at a time, a word, a line, help me, I’m
drowning ♣ swimming better than ever, to push on*

*with fewer reasons than ever, til none, but not
quite, always the shiny one among the shades,
fast as a blink, a pretty bastard, knows better
than I do what I want & what I must knows
there is no choice but to 'keep swingin' & immolatin'—*

This book had become a long, anguished confession of a love affair's slow, ugly death. Rooted fully neither in fixtion nor not-fixtion, neither dream nor waking, I wrote these pages in the winter of 2002-2003 to preserve if not assure my sanity. Odd to be again in Portland, Oregon now, six years later, writing about 2007, the year I returned, during which I published this part of this story.

What I think now is that those winter months crescendoed for me ideas & passions I'd been chasing for years. The idea of a beloved woman as artistic muse. An old, ancient idea, one I'd embraced entirely, one that drove my life, literally led me across the country & back again, & perhaps if the pursuit had involved another woman, or the same one at a different time, or—

The tumble down was hard, was a deep crash, the deepest one in some ways that I'd ever known. I left Portland in defeat, more than a broken heart, though that was true & enough—

What I lost was a part of myself, a faith that Art is invincible, that a love conceived in Art, looking toward its highest ideals, can not be bested. It can be: the dirty human world can at its worst, defeat any hope, any dream, any possibility of redemption or renewal. Can; does not always. But can, & sometimes does.

There is a limp within time will not heal; perhaps it joins other lesser limps there. Or maybe it new strengthens the pain of an old limp. I don't know, singular or multiple. I read the writing from which the above is quoted & think, ask simply: was it worth it? I tend to say yes & here's why, here's what's left of me that I hold to dearest: crushed hearts do not always leave a remain of Art. I have the words even as the girl, those years, that love I felt, all are memories. I still have the words. *I still have the Art.*

Cenacle 60 also featured reprints of a dozen poems by E.E. Cummings, one of the best American poets of the 20th century. We'd put together a book of his poems & artwork for the Burning Man Books 2006 series. It's called *All Paths Lead Where: Selected Poetry and Artwork of E.E. Cummings*; its title's poem is like a beautiful summation of Cumming's brilliant, elusive mind:

seeker of truth

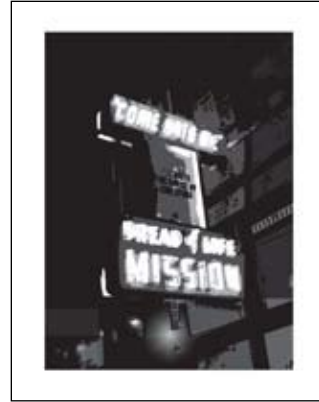
*follow no path
all paths lead where*

truth is here

The issue concludes with my "Notes from the Northwest," a brief Election Night 2006 exultation, & screed against George W. Bush; & Jim DeRogatis's historical essay on psychedelic rock, "The Long Strange Trip Continues."

This issue finished, published, disseminated, I could now begin what I called “Big Push.” I made a list of projects that I’d work on mid-February to late April & had at them concurrently—the goal being to leap Scriptor Press’s many facets forth. Actually took til mid-May to complete the “Big Push” but it was a success. What follows is description of its accomplishments.

Scriptor Press Sampler | Number 8 | *2006 Annual* came out in mid-March. This volume featured prose pieces by George Dorn & Jim Burke III; poems by Judih Haggai, Ric Amate, & myself; fiction by G.C. Dillon, fixtion by myself. Art by Nemo Boko, Emmanuelle Brochier, & Kassi & me. The *Samplers* have become a distillation of the best of the *Cenacles*, & a bit more than that. For they are intended to travel independently of the rest of Scriptor Press. A distinct entity with no elaborate explanation save a brief editor’s introduction. In sum: Here’s the art, the fixtion, the poetry, the prose; if you find kinship, enough. If you wish to connect further, then so be. My goal for the *Samplers* is to scatter them further than they are now, in print & online.



A triumph of the “Big Push” was the years-delayed publication of my second book of poetry, *Resurrection, Now*. The five poems in this book I’d written in 1998-1999. I think of them as my “early LSD” poems because I was learning to think & travel & write in psychedelic space. Each poem presents a lingual canvas upon which I worked a puzzle of ideas, images, & music.

“Resurrection, Now” was written for the many long nights I spent in tripspace with my “acid guru,” DH. He’d play guitar, we’d listen to the Grateful Dead on his stereo, it would get strange, deep, funny. we’d discuss his ideas about entropy, & I’d mull my own about the Muse. the poem concludes:

*I am in bed now. I am in a coffin now.
I close my eyes, dream past psychedelia.
I am waiting for the chimes.*

*The road toward dawn appears.
The sunrise is pink, laughs, sings my name.
I am young again. I will find her. I begin to run.*

It’s a pretty poem; I finished it on my 34th birthday, about a year after my first psychedelic experience with DH.

“The Millennial Artist’s Survival Guide” grew from a list of “acid aphorisms” I made from many solitary trips in which I’d come home with a crucial phrase in mind. It begins:

*There is a secret joy amongst
these times, a within’s within, a known
and speckled spectral thing, an exploding*

*blare & swoop from between our dreams,
a series of code & midnight shadows,
glyphs taut with our best laughter, all cosmos,
we are all cosmos, without & within.
We are all cosmos. We are all careening.
we need to begin now, trade into ecstasy,
we are beginning now. Always beginning now.*

I wrote this poem during a long night that began at a now-gone coffeehouse called Someday Cafe in Davis Square, Somerville, MA, on one subway train, then the next, then along my long walk home down Canal Street in Malden, MA, through the ancient Bell Rock Cemetery where I finished it. I wrote poems differently then, in the sense that I'd given them no structure or series, they came when & how they'd come.

"Beauty, Afflictus (for Shannon)" is dedicated to a girl I met for a few hours at a mountain festival in Vermont in the summer of 1998. The night before I'd searched & found very potent acid, & then fire & drums, & danced the death I'd been seeking, danced at my own wake, lost to the friend I'd come with, to DH, who I'd come to meet & never found. I danced & died & had met Shannon the next morning. She needed cigarettes & a few minutes of chat. For a moment the world was new again & all was well. We shared amazement. There are phrases of Dickinson, Rumi, Neruda in the poem, & much of the poem's strength draws from my long-time relationship with Renoir's 1883 painting, "Dance at Bougival," which is housed at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (it is also the book's cover). Another cry for a muse, a lover, a girl:

*At low moments in my life
I believed that truth had a
tag, a list, a dwelling.
Truth is her smile studied from
across a wooden room.*

"Phantom Limbs (After Rumi)" is a similar poem & was written less than a week later in early March 1999. Its narrative takes place in a hookah den among those who smoke hash & ruminate (the lover, the poet, the philosopher). Its thesis: "We live our lives by habit." Its conclusion:

*Redemption happens every moment of our
our lives, or never at all.*

Ten years later, I still believe this to be true. I don't see any better alternative.

The last poem, "The Groove," is actually the 100th & last poem of my *Two Vessels* poetry sequence (published in full in *Cenacle* | 39-40 | Winter 2000). This was the second time I'd written a poetry sequence: the first had been *Stranger America* in 1995 which had been published in *Cenacle* 4-5. It was hard to decide to break this poem loose of its series to place at the end of this book yet, after long debating, I did. Its subtitle indicates it was written at "Phish concert, Big Cypress Seminole Indian reservation, New Year's Day 2000, Everglades, Florida

[during midnight-to-dawn show].” The nickel tour of this poem’s background sums thus: I’d just graduated Emerson College in Boston, MA in Publishing & Writing, no job yet, but I’d celebrated by traveling with hippy kids met on the Internet down to Florida for the New Year’s Eve weekend Phish rock shows. On the last night, before the all-night-show night, I’d taken a large dose of LSD, not sure how much, & cowered in my tent for hours while entering the Void, encountering it? I don’t know. I came out, somewhat returned, still shaky, at midnight to the music, to the happy cries of 100,000 people dancing, & the poem came, in accumulating lines over the next dozen hours:

*there is no ending to the groove
through which music flows to
hearts unknown*

* * *

*the towline back is people
i told me acid told me so*

* * *

*shut the fuck up & try simple:
the magic spell begins every morning eery
day living breathing any kind of gesture
to the good, here comes someone, ask
him the way home, ask his friend, smile,
how’s the day & what may evolve, ‘just
chillin’ bro, going to a party tonight &
just chillin’ wanna come? What’s your name?’*

So seven years later, a continent away, a wedding ring now on my finger, I turned to Kassi for her assistance & together we gave these poems the home between pages I’d so wanted them to have. Finally. How I work out the like for 6 x 36 *Nocturnes, New Songs (for Cassandra)*, the ongoing *Many Musics* . . . I haven’t figured out yet.

Another “Big Push” victory was the expansion of the “Within’s Within” radio show archives to include the 21 broadcasts between June & December 2005. Building this online radio archive has been important to me. Internet radio is still a fairly unregulated wilderland, which is the good news; the bad news, or at least the challenge, is to find an audience, sympathetic & interested listeners. When I started the show on in 1999, I expected no more than a few listeners because of the very limited reach of the radio signal. Now, on the Web, more is possible.

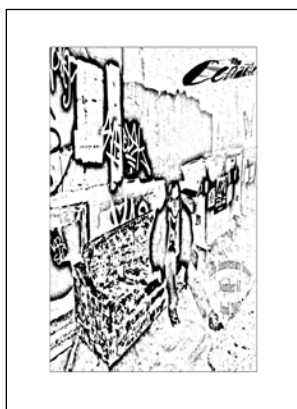
Part of the effort, maybe a lot, is attitude, how seriously one takes it. How much work is put in. Building an archive is essentially saying: this project is valid & deserves longevity.

Kin to this was my purchasing the *Scriptorpress.com* domain name. I’d done this with the encouragement of my UK friend Alfie Ilkins, who also hosted the radio show archives at this time. Owning the rights to this domain was and is a big deal: I’d started this project as a

kid, among my pencils & notebooks. Computers back then were to me the stuff of *Star Trek* & *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The domain's ownership price is small but the delight big in my head & heart.

Another purchase was a color laser printer which gave Kassi & I the option to print books or pages in color. *Resurrection*, *Now's* cover is of "Dance at Bougival" is in full color. *Cenacle* | 62 | October 2007 would have a color cover (first since *Cenacle* | 34 | April 1999). We've used this color option judiciously since because of the cost but it's damned nice when we do use it.

I also expanded the presence of my *Many Musics* series online. There was now one full series & half of a second. *Many Musics* & its fixtional counterpart *Labyrinthine* are still two of my ongoing projects. I've been writing each for nearly three years & see no definite conclusion to either. They form the last—& soon longest—pieces of what I informally call my *Double Tryptych* (poetry: *6 x 36 Nocturnes*, *New Songs*; fixtion: *Things Change?* (*Six Thresholds*), *Why?*), housing, at least in concept, this project I've been working on for nine years so far. Its scope has vastly expanded in that time. Much of this work has not even yet been published in *The Cenacle*, much less in book form. My current idea is to create a new book series, separate from RaiBooks, that would be intended exclusively for this project. Perhaps the dovetail with RaiBooks would be chapbook-length excerpts of these long works.



Coming out about two weeks after its cover date, & rounding out the "Big Push," is *Cenacle* | 61 | April 2007. This was the last issue completed while Kassi & I lived in Seattle (though *Cenacle* 62 is dated June 2007 it didn't come out til October). It features new writing by Ric Amante, GC Dillon, Judih Haggai, & myself—& cover & interior images by Kassi & myself.

"From Soulard's Notebooks" is a letter I wrote to Ric Amante about our recent visit when Kassi & I came to Boston. It was my first time back there in five years. So of course it was strange & new & nostalgic. No more subway tokens. Some businesses still there, some gone. The letter moves into a consideration of time's reality:

In my dream-life, & during many psychedelic adventures, I have experienced non-linearity, places of no-time, even places of no-place. Valid experiences if only in the sense that I believe what may occur may participate in the possible. but on return, or resumption, of life in familiar environs, the shawl of gravity, time, day & night, material history, settles, & so what I remain with are deviant memories, alternative possibilities that may be true only in my mind, or true beyond it. Or perhaps all is one mind, all realities one reality; all soul, one soul.

These questions & answers remain of course; they always will while conscious, thinking.

GC Dillon's "The Blackthorn Mirror" revives an old character of his, Jasmine Ashbourne. Her years in college over, she now works at a bank as a "Cashier Team Leader, a fancy name to give you the work of a low-level manager, but not the pay of one." The story takes place in a pub, involves an old mirror & its supposed power to reveal the results of paths not taken, by choice or chance: "The what-if images, thoughts, never-had memories were seductive. so inviting to lose oneself in the mirror's reflected reality. So addictive." In Dillon's fiction, we each

sit precarious on a deep, deep well of the past, inviting us to fall in, give up the new efforts; & yet his characters rarely do. The possibility seems enough.

Cenacle 61 contains the last three dozen or so of my *New Songs (for Cassandra)*. I'd intended to finish them by our wedding date, 12/31/05, but it was not until February 5, 2006 that I'd finished the 180th & last of them, "Wedding." 180 poems in about 400 days. It was a concentrated effort & what it taught me was the great value in the short poem, & that I could, with hard focus, write as many poems as I willed & wished. There are a number of these poems I still like but will limit myself to a few words about "Wedding." It is 38 lines—six stanzas of six lines each, plus one additional closing couplet. Each stanza begins with the phrase "Vow union again" save for the last which begins "We vow to." I find the line "Only bid fidelity to what sing trues to the sweet burst with" still moving, & the closing lines:

*"We vow to live this world in all its going beauty,
great, crumbling, how helpless happy it passes"*

I had come close to marriage with other women. Talk of it anyway. When it came, it was pleasing, & welcome; yet I had to re-inflate something in myself to participate fully. I married a woman who values me more honestly for what I am, & takes seriously what is between us. I got lucky, eventually.

This issue features a re-print of Raymond Carver's masterful story, "A Small, Good Thing," which we also published in the Burning Man Books 2006 series. Carver's fiction is severely beautiful, a hurting, redeeming Art. This story, concerning the slow, painful, accidental death of a child, is one of the most powerful short fictions in the English language. Ever.

In Judih Haggai's poems there are three lines that stand out in particular (from "Whisper My Voice"):

*at the end of the tunnel
wherever it leads
stands a light haloed welcome*

What is challenging in writing poems for many years, for persisting in writing them, one after the next, is that one eventually is gazing back at ever increasing path, strangely dimming & glaring, & toward a future with a wall, unseeable but there, whenever & wherever it is. To look toward that wall at all is a brave act. To do so in one's Art is even more perilous, even braver.

Part four of my *Things Change (Six Thresholds)* continues the narrative of my struggles to keep along as 2003 progressed. Most of its pages could hardly be called story; I write of the pain of leaving the places & people I care for, & of returning to where I came from. I write of ruins. Eventually, something of a narrative emerges, I begin to recover, cohere, something. I think the following passage comes from this story's deepest heart:

Well. Regard happiness when bitter & broken ranges & rages about. See how the hurt feeds on happiness, won't stop til none left—so happiness backs away, keeps some, insists—that's how it survives—gives away the froth, keeps the veins—the muscle—the heart—the living engine making, being, living happiness—you sucking bastards can't have it—else I become one with nothing too—again—

I kept writing because I had to. Capitulation to failure, unhappiness, gains nothing in this world. Not even relief. I believe living beings bear innate in them a will to survive, to keep coming despite impediment, despite odds, despite all. Only death itself defeats the will to keep on, & what death is—finale or segue—none can say for sure who still reside this near side of it. So I read these old, sad, defiant pages now & I nod at how they unknowing led to now, to new pages. No victory had they not, no profit at all.

While Ric Amante has been publishing poems in *The Cenacle* since its beginning in 1995, & early on some letters too (most notably in *Cenacle* | 20-21 | Summer 1997), I'd never seen or published any of his fiction. So "Ecuador Hotel" is a delight; *Cenacle* 61 features its first three parts. Set in a flophouse loosely based on the Panama Hotel in Seattle, Amante tells the story of the encounter between protagonist Federico & a mystery man named Paul Skype who lives in Room 19. The narrative actually leaves off just prior to their first formal meeting. A sample of Amante's hyperbolic prose in the description of the hotel:

Federico was sleeping on a stained and sagging mattress in a hotel held together with duct tape and spit, whose name evoked lassitude, tropical disregard of time, faith, and merriment in the vegetal blossomings of chaos—while outside his cracked window the voices and attitudes were humorless, paranoic, proper. Even a leisurely smoke on a vacant stop was a threat and an affront to man and mountain alike.

My "Notes from the Northwest" mostly concern the Iraq War & Occupation, but by way of contrast I include a note written at my beloved old courtyard haunt at Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts, & a futile plea for NBC-TV to renew *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*. I deliberately let "Notes from the Northwest" cover a variety of topics from my notebooks that would otherwise not see publication. Each issue I pick what seems the best from what I've written since the previous issue.

The last piece in the issue is a reprint of an excerpt from Stewart Tendler & David May's 1984 book, *The Brotherhood of Eternal Love*, about a group of underground idealistic acid dealers which flourished in the late 1960s. I believe that the counterculture must make sure its history is preserved & disseminated or much of it will be distorted or simply lost. The facts of any era are infinite in number, & the feel of an era is even more elusive as it passes. Thus narrative oral histories are as important as statistics, mass media, & public records of debate & governance.

A concluding comment on the front & back covers. The front is a black & white & somewhat Photoshopped version of the *Resurrection, Now* volume's color back cover of me, released at the same time. The back is a photo derived from an anti-war rally in downtown Seattle, coupled with a quotation from Robert F. Kennedy. I was leaving Seattle but I was grateful for having lived there.

From the end of the "Big Push" in mid-May on through the summer, Kassi & I worked on preparations for Scriptor Press's third appearance at the Portland Zine Symposium & ninth appearance at the Burning Man Arts Festival. Core to this preparation was adding six new titles to the Burning Man Books series, volumes 49 to 54.

For a number of years, choosing the titles was less challenging. I did it myself & based my choices initially on building up from the canon of great world writers a collection of writers I personally admired, loved. Eventually, I wanted to expand out, cover more ground in terms

of geography, gender, race, ethnicity, content. Sometimes I've chosen to include writers that I would argue would belong in such a collection while others would disagree. On the other hand, some of the "greats" (such as William Blake & D.H. Lawrence) may never be represented. It comes down to a few criteria: do I like the writer very much? Can his or her work be enjoyed without a presumed knowledge of many other books? Can his or her work be fairly represented in a 40-60 page chapbook?



The last few years the selection process has become more a collaboration between Kassi & me—and I've had to do more research to find new additions to the library. I begin the work in January & Kassi joins me not long after. 2007's picks included Joyce Carol Oates' fiction "The Witness" (a story selected after reading dozens of her short fictions); "Bios and Mythos" by Joseph Campbell (this essay on mythology includes a glossary for some of its more challenging diction & terms); "The Myth of the Cave" by Plato (I actually had read this long ago in a philosophy class & decided it would aid the series in touching on classical philosophy); *Selections from Winesburg, Ohio* by Sherwood Anderson (another old favorite, despite my belief that I have no old favorites left to publish; its challenge was to cull a chapbook of pieces from a story sequence too long to publish as a whole); *If There is No God: Selected Poetry and Prose of Czesław Miłosz* (Kassi & I worked pretty hard to create this book—Miłosz, an amazing & prolific writer, being new to both of us); & *Infinite Coincidence: A Ninth Anthology of Writings About Psychedelics* (its title from a song by the indie rock band Bright Eyes, this volume includes a chemistry discussion of psychedelics by Rick Strassman; a vintage 1966 essay on LSD from the underground journal *Ramparts*; an essay about the Eleusinian Mysteries by Carl A.P. Ruck; a 1983 interview with the scientist John Lilly; a 2006 British press piece about ending the

taboo on psychedelic psychotherapy; & a list of recommended psychedelic websites).

The Portland Zine Symposium went well although the basic presumption there is that wares are sold or traded. Some people shied away from our free bookstore. Others, however, were very enthused & made the experience worthwhile.

Burning Man 2007 was its wonderful, overwhelming experience. We not only brought *Cenacles*, Samplers, RaiBooks, & Burning Man Books (new & old), but we'd proofread every Burning Man Book to fix old errors. Took weeks but why bring over 1000 books to such an event if they are not close to error-free?

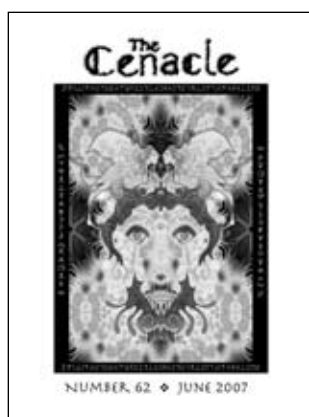
We returned to Seattle from Black Rock City & in a few days it was time for me to start my new job as knowledge base manager at Symantec. I'd taken this job knowing it would allow us to move to Portland & me to work at home there. Thus it was a wish fulfilled. About five years after my first move to Portland, I was moving there again. Instead of chasing a fruitless romance, & leaving jobless & broken, I was arriving with my love & a job in hand. We arrived in late September.

Of course it was strange being back. Five years is hardly a breath in heart's time. I didn't miss the old girlfriend—she was someone else now than who I'd loved. I missed to a degree the person I'd been: I'd written then with an obsessiveness that comes from standing so close to the edge for so long. I'd had few friends back then, & no computer of my own. What I had, simply, were my pens & notebooks, my CD player & a handful of CDs, my library card, & a strange room in a rooming house.

I only reminisce because of the writing I was doing, & I can say that since I've been back in Portland, I've done of a lot more. If anything is finally true, it's that I honor then by having survived the worst of it, I've come to better days. But I guess that people are inclined to sentimentalize their hardest days. Anyway—

It was October 2007 & I dug into my new job & into Scriptor Press work. I set to resuming my "Within's Within" radio show. The first Saturday I was ready to broadcast (9/15/07), our Internet service proved unready & so I had to pack up laptop computer, microphone, & notes, & walk on down to Coffee Time Coffee House . . . Where . . . strangely . . . I write this from tonight. A cavernous place, multiple rooms, walls a deep crimson alternating with strange paintings. All sorts come through here, from the thick-walleted to the homeless. I used to come here when I lived in Portland first time around, sat in an old armchair writing for my life. Anyway, that October morning I arrived here, settled in a booth when it got free, & resumed my radio show.

Also that month arrived the months-late *Cenacle* | 62 | June 2007. I made the decision



along the way that I would finish this issue as dated, & then issue the next number, 63, dated December 2007. It too would come out after its issue date, but my intention was to catch up in increments. I think my most important thought was to finish the last Seattle issue of *The Cenacle* clearly & rightly.

It had been eight years since its last color cover, *Cenacle* | 34 | April 1999. The first one in color was *Cenacle* | 24-25 | Winter 1998. *Cenacle* 62's front cover is by Emma Brochier & its back cover is by Nemo Boko. Both had previously contributed art to the journal but this was the first time their art could be appreciated in full glory. This issue began the annual appearance of color covers; I decided

thereon to make it the anniversary issue in April.

Cenacle 62 also marked the first time I published a letter of mine to an elected representative. I wrote to United State Senator Patty Murray, a Democrat representing Washington State. I admire Murray, a generally progressive Senator who usually serves the interests of her constituency. But by mid-June 2007 it was clear that she & her party colleagues in Congress were not doing enough to end the U.S. military occupation of Iraq. The 2006 congressional elections which gave the Democrats new majorities in both houses of Congress did not also give them a stronger will to oppose Bush's war. The key issue was continued war funding, which Murray voted for at the time I wrote to her. My conclusion sums my sentiment:

The Occupation of Iraq is a crime against humanity, against the world, & you are now participating in it with your latest vote. I urge you to put aside your career interests, your pollsters, your big money donors, and look again at the pictures and read the accounts of what has been done in the United States' name over there. And I hope never to hear again that you have used any pathetic excuse for continuing that situation for a single hour longer than it takes to pull American troops out. As of your latest vote, the blood of the dead and wounded is now all over your hands.

The funding of the occupation continued through 2007.

Cenacle 62 featured the debut of my *Many Musics* poems, which I consider to be the continuation of *6 x 36 Nocturnes & New Songs (for Cassandra)*. Begun in June 2006, *Many Musics* (& its companion fixtion *Labyrinthine*) did not have the strictures of number of poems or length of composition imposed on those previous works. I decided I'll write these til I'm done. The poems might be long, short, multiple-parted, will work lines & old poems over again & again, mix & mix, even older poems than those in *New Songs* & *6 x 36 Nocturnes*. *Many Musics* is a culminating work of sort, although I think that of every current work. In a sense, *Many Musics* contains the rest of my poems like a single city spreading out into unsettled darkness, & lighting it up. It begins:

*Many musics, wake, blink, call it a world.
Wake, blink, call it your world, leave dream's
warped glare, exhale, return. Sing true,
many musics, through the day's tasks,
through its troubles, from some kind
year, its elusive face, to another's heart
liquid cracking hungry into wood, shouting
dancers, full moon's frenzied lean.*

My eventual goal with *Many Musics*, as with other writing projects, was to bring its most recent pieces to the pages of *The Cenacle*. Poems as news, a literary journal as a different kind of newspaper. This has become very important to me even as I am still working toward its fully happening.

Ric Amante's "Ecuador Hotel" continued in this issue. Amante escalates in tension the pending meeting of his two main characters down by the city pier, writing in part:

Federico, Skype—two strangely formidable outcasts beating a path to a workingman's and dreamer's hotel in a northern city by the sea, two strands of a frayed helix whose joyous replication is precise, timely, unknowable.

I can only say I await further sections of this work & will regard the world a better place for them coming.

Judih Haggai's poetry crescendos at one point with the following lines:

*it's a search
an impossible search
for my inner Tibetan
my book of the dead
my ohm SP? and my enlightenment
not mine
not me
my search for the not mine
but the cosmic all*

She then claims the search "is doomed to fizzle" but I think the worth is in her poetry's great grasping, not what it seems unable to reach.

In part five of my fixtion *Things Change? [Six Thresholds]*, there is twined a continuing monologue of suffering & survival with a wish for returning story. I was writing these pages in 2002 and 2003 with a heart recovering from defeat, beginning to stir again to new days & their possibilities:

Night wet & cold, & funny, & it challenges me to join anew & anew, among the many songs, & little can I resist, the more I open out the more pours through me, my scattered days & hours & years resembling meaning & this fat sheaf of pages matters, & while I cannot be new neither shall I be old, something other seems more right, for the rage in my veins is thrashing & unkempt like always, & the love for both smooth & burn is ever high—

I had to find a way to function again, to "fix" myself enough & step along, to see new, shake off the rust & the woes. I trusted, trust, myself enough to know that pages dirty & pages pretty will both keep coming if I keep my pen moving.

Joyce Carol Oates' short fiction "The Witness" is reprinted in *Cenacle* 62 & as a volume in the Burning Man Books 2007 series. This story of a young girl whose fragmenting home life leads her to witness accidentally a murder in a park bears many of Oates' strengths as a writer: her strange & sympathetic characters; her love of the weirdly macabre; and her deep sense of how loved ones powerfully & unintentionally affect each other. It stands as a valid representation of her large & impressive body of work.

My "Notes from Northwest" is subtitled "On the Occupation" & continues my writing on the same topic as the "From Soulard's Notebooks" piece. What made 2007 so hard to live through was watching the U.S. Congress do *nothing* about the Iraq Occupation, save continue funding it. By June, no single figure in Washington had yet emerged as the face of the anti-war movement. The 2008 elections were far, far off, yet elected officials were already jockeying for

what was to come during them.

Looking back I can see now that what *was* happening was that the “netroots” in cyberspace were rising up in power & cohesion. A combination of websites like Daily Kos, the Democratic Underground, and MoveOn.org along with radio shows on Air America (mostly notably those hosted by Randi Rhodes & Rachel Maddow), were encouraging a still-nascent progressive movement to get serious about building infrastructure (mailing lists, shared research pools, polling data, and so on). What the Bush criminal cabal did not see coming was the 21st century. While they were relying on building bombs & appearing on the TV news, cyberspace was crowded with the voices of their demise, meeting, talking, planning. It was cyberspace that kept Bush from invading Iran for it was cyberspace that created the pressure on Congress to avert it. It was what we achieved in 2007: a non-event: the non-invasion of Iran. How the world would have turned if that invasion happened!

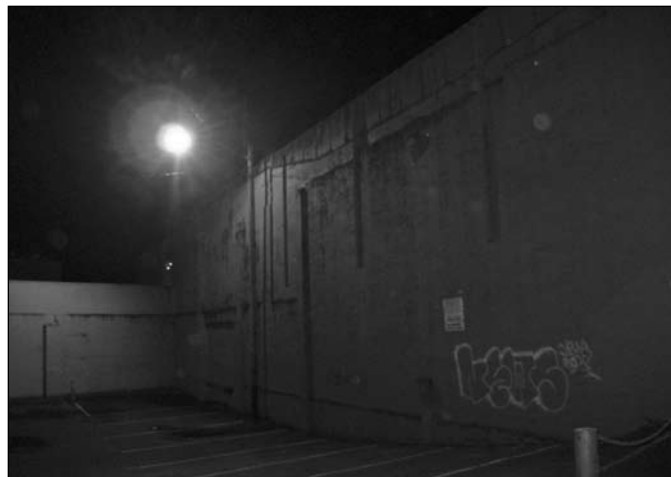
The reprint of Donovan Bess’s 1966 *Ramparts* essay “LSD: The Acid Test . . . and Beyond” is valuable as front-line reporting from history. 1966 was the year when LSD was outlawed in the U.S. & elsewhere. Bess’s discussion of yagé is also notable as nascent Western interest in this substance back then has grown much, much large in the decades since.

December 2007 marked the second time I’d ended a year living in Portland. But unlike 2002, I had a job & an untreachorous beloved. I was still settling in, renewing old friendships, mulling possibilities. 2008 beckoned me personally, with what Kassi & I might accomplish now that we had some stability, & also on a larger scale, with how things might continue to change before the 2008 U.S. elections. I wondered about Barack Obama, about comparisons made between him & Robert F. Kennedy. I wondered, I hoped, that a turn toward better days was due & soon. It had been long years since anything like genuine hope roamed the planet.

It was coming.



* * * * *



Notes on Contributors

AbandonView lives in the American Rust Belt. He is a dear friend & great artist whose work is new to the pages of *The Cenacle*. More of his fine art & writing can be found online at: <http://wetscraps.blogspot.com>.

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 66 | October 2008. His work is gifted, raw, & brave, as is the life he has lived. Another book of his poetry published by Scriptor Press may be forthcoming.

G.C. Dillon lives in Plainville, Connecticut. His fiction last appeared in *Cenacle* | 67 | December 2008. Happily, he & I have begun anew work on a volume of his stories to be published in the near future by Scriptor Press.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, the great Russian writer, was born in Moscow in 1821 and died in St. Petersburg in 1881. His story in this issue also appears as a volume in Scriptor Press's Burning Man Books 2008 series.

Ralph H. Emerson lives in South Glastonbury, Connecticut. His writing last appeared in *Cenacle* | 67 | December 2008. We are working toward a book of his linguistics essays to be published by Scriptor Press.

Christopher Patrick Gose lives in New Mexico. His writing is new to the pages of *The Cenacle*. We've been friends in cyberspace for years but have jacked this ante up now in this periodical. His travel writings can also be found online at: <http://azure.sati.us/window/animamundi.html>.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 67 | December 2008. Her photography is a delightful new arrival to these pages and complements her new writing very effectively. Jude also moderates an online poetry jam called *Thistles and Marigolds* at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>

Susan Jones lives in Portland, Oregon. KD & I met her in 2008, & have been lucky enough to have her presence at some of our Jellicle Literary Guild meetings. We first heard her read the story in this issue at one of these gatherings, and this led to its publication here.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Portland, Oregon. By her smart & talented hand was ScriptorPress.com recently given a major revision &, because of her encouragement, issues of *The Cenacle* will hereon show signs of improved design.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Portland, Oregon. Jobless recently, again, I determined not to drown so badly in my mind. Got a job, made it to shore again. Still breathing at least. Maybe I can stay out of the jobless waters for a longer stretch this time around.





*"When you can't run, you crawl,
and when you can't crawl,
you find somebody to carry you."*

-Joss Whedon & Tim Minear, Firefly, 2003.